LOST ON THE ORINOCO

PAN AMERICAN SERIES

VENEZUELA

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

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Over it went, carrying the boys with it.

Pan-American Series

LOST ON THE ORINOCO

OR

AMERICAN BOYS IN VENEZUELA

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "With Washington in the West," "American Boys' Life of William McKinley," "On to Pekin," "Between Boer and Briton," "Old Glory Series," "Ship and Shore Series," "Bound to Succeed Series," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. B. SHUTE

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LOST ON THE ORINOCO

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PREFACE

"LOST ON THE ORINOCO" is a complete tale in itself, but forms the first volume of the "Pan American Series," a line of books intended to embrace sight-seeing and adventures in different portions of the three Americas, especially such portions as lie outside of the United States.

The writing of this series has been in the author's mind for several years, for it seemed to him that here were many fields but little known and yet well worthy the attention of young people, and especially young men who in business matters may have to look beyond our own States for their opportunities. The great Pan American Exhibition at Buffalo, N. Y. did much to open the eyes of many regarding Central and South America, but this exposition, large as it was, did not tell a hundredth part of the story. As one gentleman having a Venezuelan exhibit there expressed it: "To show up Venezuela properly, we should have to bring half of the Re-

public here." And what is true of Venezuela is true of all the other countries.

In this story are related the sight seeing and adventures of five wide-awake American lads who visit Venezuela in company with their academy professor, a teacher who had in former years been a great traveler and hunter. The party sail from New York to La Guayra, visit Caracas, the capital, Macuto, the fashionable seaside resort, and other points of interest nearby; then journey westward to the Gulf of Maracaibo and the immense lake of the same name; and at last find themselves on the waters of the mighty Orinoco, the second largest stream in South America, a body of water which maintains a width of three miles at a distance of over 600 miles from the ocean. Coffee and cocoa plantations are visited, as well as the wonderful gold and silver mines and the great *llanos,* or prairies, and the boys find time hanging anything but heavy on their hands. Occasionally they get into a difficulty of more or less importance, but in the end all goes well.

In the preparation of the historical portions of this book the very latest American, British and Spanish authorities have been consulted. Concerning the coffee, mining and other industries most of the in-

formation has come from those directly interested in these branches. This being so, it is hoped that the work will be found accurate and reliable as well as interesting.

Once more thanking the thousands who have read my previous books for the interest they have shown, I place this volume in their hands trusting it will fulfil their every expectation.

April 1, 1902. EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

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LOST ON THE ORINOCO

CHAPTER I

THE BOYS TALK IT OVER

"HURRAH, Mark, it's settled at last."

"What is settled, Frank?"

"We are to go to Venezuela and other places in South America. My father just got the word from Professor Strong. I brought the letter along for you to read."

"That's certainly immense news," remarked Mark Robertson, as he took the letter which Frank Newton held out to him. "Does he say how soon he will be able to start?"

"Just as soon as he can settle up affairs at Lakeview Academy. I suppose he's got quite something to do there yet. But we can hurry him along, can't we?"

"I don't think you'll hurry the professor much,"

answered Mark, as he began to read the communication which had been passed to him. "He's one of the kind that is slow but sure—not but that he can move quick enough, when you least expect it."

"As for instance on the night we tried to hide all the schoolbooks in the old boathouse," responded Frank, with a twinkle in his eye. "He caught us neatly, didn't he?"

"That's what. Hullo! So Beans and Darry are going, too. I like that first rate. Beans is all right, even if he is from Boston, and Darry will furnish fun enough for a minstrel show."

"To be sure. I wouldn't want to go if they weren't along, and you. But do you see what the professor says on the last page? He wants to take Jake the Glum along too."

At this the face of Mark Robinson fell somewhat. "I wish he had left Glummy out," he said. "He knows the fellow is sour to the last degree and a bully in the bargain."

"I guess the professor wants to reform him, Mark."

"He'll have up-hill work doing it. Glummy has been at the academy two years and I know him pretty thoroughly."

"Well, he'll be the richest boy in the crowd. Perhaps that had something to do with taking him along."

"No, the professor doesn't think so much of money as that. Each person in the crowd will have to pay his share of the expenses and his share of the professor's salary, and that's all, outside of the incidentals."

"I wonder if the incidentals won't be rather high."

"I fancy we can make them as high as we please —buying souvenirs and things like that. You can be sure Glummy will try his best to cut a wide swath if he gets the chance."

"Perhaps the professor will hold him in. But it's great news, isn't it?" And in his enthusiasm Frank began to dance an impromptu jig on the library floor.

Frank Newton was a New York city youth, sixteen years of age, tall, well-built and rather good looking. He was the only son of a Wall Street banker, and if his parent was not a millionaire he was exceedingly well to do. The lad resided in the fashionable part of Madison Avenue when at home, which was not often, for his family were fond of

going abroad, and either took the boy with them or sent him to boarding school.

Directly opposite the home of the Newtons lived the Robertson family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Robertson, Mark, and several smaller children. Mr. Robertson was a dry goods importer who owned an interest in several mills in England and Scotland, and he made trips across the Atlantic semi-yearly.

Although Mark Robertson was a year older than Frank Newton, the two lads were warm friends and had gone to school together for years. Their earlier education had been had in the city, but when Frank was eleven and Mark twelve both had been packed off to Lakeview Academy, a small but well conducted school nestling among the hills of New Hampshire.

Five years of life at the academy had made the place seem like a second home to the boys. The master, Professor Amos Strong, was a thorough gentleman and scholar, and under his guidance the boys progressed rapidly in all their studies. The professor had in his day been both a traveler and hunter, and the stories he was wont to relate during off hours were fascinating to the last degree.

As might be expected, the boys, while at school,

made many friends and also an enemy or two, although as regards the latter, the enmity was never very deep, for Professor Strong would not tolerate anything underhanded or sneakish.

Next to Mark, Frank's dearest chum at the academy was Dartworth Crane, a slightly built boy of fifteen, who was as full of fun as a boy can well be. Dartworth, or " Darry " as he was always called for short, was the son of a rich Chicago cattle dealer, and the boy's earlier days had been spent on a ranch in Montana. He loved to race on horseback and hunt and fish, and the master sometimes had all he could do to hold the sunny but impetuous lad within proper bounds.

As Frank had another chum, so did Mark, in the person of Samuel Winthrop, the son of a well-to-do widow who resided in the Back Bay district of Boston. Samuel was a tall, studious looking individual, with a high forehead and a thick mass of curly black hair. Because he came from Boston, he had been nick-named " Beans," and although he did not relish the *sobriquet* it was likely to stick to him for years to come.

Among the lads to join those at the academy two years before had been Jacob Hockley, a thin, lank

youth of Mark's age, with a white freckled face and hair strongly inclined to be red. Hockley was the only son and heir of a millionaire lumber dealer of Pennsylvania. His manner was peculiar, at times exceedingly "bossy" as the others declared, and then again morose and sour, the latter mood having won for him the nickname of "Glummy" or "Jake the Glum." Hockley was given to spending his money, of which he had more than was good for him, freely, but even this had failed to make him any substantial friends.

The enmity between Hockley on one side, and Frank and Mark on the other, had arisen over the captaincy of the academy baseball team the summer previous. Jake wished to be the captain of the team, and had done his best to persuade or buy the boys over to vote for him. But Frank had advocated Mark for the captaincy, and Mark had won, much to the lank youth's discomfiture.

"You'll never win a game with Mark Robertson as captain and with Frank Newton on first-base," had been Jake's sour comment, but he was sadly mistaken. That summer the team played nine games with the teams from rival schools, and won seven of the contests. The winning made Jake Hockley

more down on Mark and Frank than ever, but as the others were popular he had often to conceal his real feelings.

On a windy night in June the cry of "fire!" had aroused every inmate of Lakeview Academy from his bed, and had caused all to leave the rambling building in a hurry. The conflagration had started in the laundry, and from this room quickly communicated to the kitchen, dining hall, and then the remainder of the stone and wood structure. In such a high wind, the fire department from the village, two miles away, could do little or nothing, and the efforts of the students, headed by the several teachers, were likewise of no avail. Inside of three hours everything was swept away and only a cellar full of blackened debris marked the spot where the picturesque academy had once stood.

Under such circumstances many a man would have been too stunned to act immediately, but ere the stones of the building were cold, Professor Strong was laying his plans with the insurance companies for the erection of a new and better structure. The students were cared for at some neighboring houses and then refitted with clothing and sent home.

During the fall there had been much talk of a

personally conducted tour to South America during the coming year, the tour to be under the guidance of Professor Strong, who had been South a number of times before. Letters had been sent to the parents of various students, but nothing definite had been done up to the time the fire occurred.

Mark and Frank had planned for the trip South, and could not bear to think of giving it up, and as soon as Professor Strong was in a position to give them his attention, Frank had gotten his father to write concerning it. Several letters passed, and at last Professor Strong decided to leave the building and the management of the new academy to his brother, who had just left the faculty of Harvard, and go with the boys.

While the trip was being talked of at the academy, previous to the fire, Jake Hockley had announced his determination to go, but since the boys had separated, nothing more had been heard from the lank youth, and Mark and Frank were hoping he had given the plan up. The announcement therefore, that he would make one of the party, put a damper on their enthusiasm.

"He'll get us into some kind of trouble before we

get back, you see if he doesn't," was Frank's comment.

"I'll make him keep his distance," was Mark's reply. "If he attempts to go too far I'll show him that I won't stand any nonsense."

The party of six were to leave for Venezuela by way of New York city, and a few days after the conversation just recorded Sam Winthrop came down on the train from Boston, to remain with Mark until the arrival of the professor.

"Beans, by all that's delightful!" cried Mark, as he wrung his friend's hand. "So glad you came a few days ahead."

"I wanted a chance to look around New York," answered Sam Winthrop. "I've never had a chance before, you know."

"You shall look around, all you please, and Frank and I will go with you."

"Is Darry here yet?"

"No, but Frank expects him to-morrow. Then we can all go around until Professor Strong arrives. But say, what do you think about Glummy going?" and Mark looked anxious.

"Can't say that I am overjoyed, Mark."

"I wish it was anybody but Hockley—and Frank wishes the same."

"Well, all arrangements have been made, so we'll have to make the best of it. But I heard one thing that doesn't please me," went on Sam. "I got a letter from Dick Mason, and in it he said Glummy was talking of the trip to some of his chums, and said he was going just to show Frank and you a thing or two."

"Did he? I wonder what he meant?"

"He didn't mean anything very good, you can be sure of that, Mark."

"You are right. We'll certainly have to keep our eyes open and watch him," concluded Mark, seriously.

CHAPTER II

PREPARING FOR THE START

On the following morning Darry Crane came in, on the Limited Express direct from Chicago. He sent a telegram ahead, to Frank, who went up to the Grand Central depot to meet his chum.

"Had a fine trip," said Darry, "but, honest, I couldn't get here fast enough, I've been that anxious to see you. Heard from Beans yet? I'll wager he comes down with his grip loaded with beans, on account of the long trip, you know. What, didn't bring any beans? Must be a mistake about that."

"I guess he was afraid you'd forget the pork," answered Frank, with a laugh. "But how have you been since you left school?"

"First-class. Went West, you know, with my father and nearly rode a pony to death on the Lone Star ranch. Oh, it was glorious to get over the ground. Beats a stuffy old city all to bits. Hold on, I've got to look after my trunk. Wouldn't want

to lose that, for it's got the whole outfit for the trip in it."

"Our man will have the trunk brought to our house," answered Frank. "You come with me, and I'll take you down to Mark's, where you'll find Beans. By the way, heard anything of Glummy?"

"Did I? Well, I just guess, Frank. What do you think? He actually paid me a visit—not very long, of course, but still he came to see me. Said he was passing through Chicago on a trip to St. Louis, and felt that he had to hunt up an old chum. I almost fainted when he said it. But he acted quite decent, I must admit, not a bit airish or sour either."

"Did he say anything about this trip to South America?"

"Not much, excepting that he would like to go if it went through. I didn't say much either, for I was thinking you and Mark wouldn't like to have him along. You don't, do you?"

"Not much, although I guess we can stand it if he lets us alone. We needn't have much to do with him."

Taking Darry's valise from him, Frank led the way to the street and hailed a passing auto-cab, and both were speedily taken to the home on Madison

Avenue. A few minutes later thty hurried across the way and joined Mark and Sam.

In anticipation of the good times ahead, all four of the lads were in a happy frame of mind, and the remainder of the day was spent by the New Yorkers in showing the visitors around Central Park and other points of interest. In the afternoon the four went down town and crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. Then they came back to the Battery and took the little craft which plies hourly between that point and Bedloe's Island, where is located the Statue of Liberty, standing as a gigantic sentinel to New York Bay.

"How big it looks when one is close to it," remarked Sam, when they disembarked close to the base of the statue. "I thought climbing to the top would be easy, but I fancy it's going to be as tedious as climbing to the top of Bunker Hill monument."

And so it proved, as they went up the dark and narrow circular steps leading to the crown of the statue. They wished to go up into the torch, but the way was blocked owing to repairs.

Suddenly Mark, on looking around him, uttered an exclamation of surprise. "Glummy Hockley! How did you get here?"

His words caused the others to forget their sight seeing for the moment, and they faced about, to find themselves confronted by the freckled-faced youth, who had been gazing in the opposite direction.

"I'll thank you not to call me 'Glummy,'" said Hockley, coolly, although he too was taken by surprise. Then he turned to Darry. "How do you do, Darry? When did you arrive?"

Mark bit his lip and looked at Frank, who gave him a knowing look in return. Clearly it had been an ill beginning to the conversation. Somehow Mark felt as if he had not done just right.

"Excuse me, Glum—I mean Hockley, I'll try to remember your proper name after this," he stammered.

"I don't mind those things at school, but you must remember we are not at school now," went on Hockley, with something of an air of importance. Then he smiled faintly at Sam. "How are you, Beans?"

"Excuse me, but we are not at school now, and my name's not 'Beans,'" was the dry response.

There was a second of silence, and then Darry burst into a roar of laughter, and Frank and Mark were compelled to follow, the whole thing seemed

so comical. Hockley grew red, but when Sam joined in the merriment he felt compelled to smile himself, although he looked more sour than ever directly afterward.

"All right, Sam, I'll try to remember," he said with an effort, and held out his hand.

The two shook hands and then the lank youth shook hands with Darry. After this there was nothing to do but for Frank and Mark to take Hockley's hand also, and this they did, although stiffly.

But the ice was broken and soon all were talking as a crowd of boys usually do. Hockley had brought a field glass with him and insisted on all using it.

"Bought it down in Maiden Lane this morning," he remarked. "Got the address of a first-class firm from a friend who knows all about such things. It cost me sixty-five dollars, but I reckon it's worth it. Ain't many better glasses around. I expect it will be just the thing in Venezuela."

"No doubt," said Darry, but felt somewhat disgusted over Hockley's air of importance. Nevertheless, the glass was a fine one, and everybody enjoyed looking through it. Ships coming up the Lower Bay could be seen at a long distance, and

they could also see over Brooklyn and Long Island, and over Jersey City and Newark to the Orange Mountains.

"What are you fellows going to do to-night?" questioned Hockley, when they were going down the stairs again.

"We thought something of going to Manhattan Beach to see the fireworks——" began Frank, and broke off short.

"I was thinking of going to Coney Island," went on the lank youth. "Supposing we all go there? I'll foot the bill."

"I shouldn't care to go to Coney Island, and I don't think Darry and Sam will care either," said Mark.

"Let us all go to Manhattan," broke in Sam. "I've often heard of the fireworks." He had not the heart to give Hockley too much of a cold shoulder.

So it was arranged, on the way back to the Battery, and then there was nothing to do but ask the lank youth to dine with them.

"We are bound to have Glummy on us, sooner or later," whispered Mark to Frank, while they were eating. "Perhaps it's just as well to make the best

of it. It will be time enough to turn on him when he does something which is openly offensive."

When it came time to settle the bill, the lank youth wished to pay for everybody, but the others would not allow this.

"Let everybody pay for himself," said Darry. "Then there won't be any trouble."

"I can pay as well as not," said Hockley, sourly.

"So can any of us," returned Mark, dryly; and there the subject dropped.

The trip to Manhattan Beach and the fireworks were very enjoyable, and before the evening came to an end everybody was in a much better humor, although both Mark and Frank felt that they would have enjoyed the trip more had Hockley not been present.

Hockley was stopping at the Astor House, and left them near the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge. He had wanted them to have a late supper with him, and had even mentioned wine, but all had declined, stating they were tired and wished to go to bed.

"He must be getting to be a regular high flyer if he uses much wine," remarked Frank when the four were on their way uptown. "What a fool he is with his money. He thinks that covers everything."

"He'll be foolish to take to drink," returned Darry. "It has ruined many a rich young fellow, and he ought to know it."

"I think Hockley would be all right if it wasn't for the high opinion he has of himself," came from Sam. "But his patronizing way of talking is what irritates. He considers nobody as important as himself. In one way I think he'd be better off if he was poor."

"The family haven't been rich very long—only eight or ten years, so I've heard," said Mark. "Poor Hockley isn't used to it yet. It will be a lesson to him to learn that there are lots of other rich folks in this world who aren't making any fuss and feathers about it."

In the morning came a message from Professor Strong, stating that he had arrived, and was stopping at the Hotel Manhattan. He added that he would see Mr. Robertson and Mr. Newton that morning, and would be at the service of the boys directly after lunch.

"Now we won't lose much more time," cried Frank. "I declare I wish we were to sail for Venezuela to-day."

"I fancy the professor has a good many arrange-

ments to make," said Sam. "It's quite a trip we are contemplating, remember."

"Pooh! it's not such a trip to Caracas," returned Darry. "My father was down there once—looking at a coffee plantation."

"A trip to Caracas wouldn't be so much, Darry," said Mark. "But you must remember that we are going further,—to the great lake of Maracaibo, and then around to the mouth of the Orinoco, and hundreds of miles up that immense stream. They tell me that the upper end of the Orinoco is as yet practically unexplored."

"Hurrah! we'll become the Young Explorers!" cried Darry, enthusiastically. "Say, I wonder if the professor will want us to go armed?"

"I don't think so," said Frank. "He'll go armed, and as he is a crack shot I guess that will do for the lot of us."

"Glummy showed me a pearl-handled pistol he had just bought," put in Sam. "He said it cost him sixteen dollars."

"He'd be sure to mention the price," said Frank, with a sickly grin. "I'd like to see him face some wild beast—I'll wager he'd drop his pistol and run for his life."

"Maybe somebody else would run, too," came from Mark. "I don't believe it's much fun to stand up in front of a big wild animal."

"Are there any such in Venezuela?"

"I don't know—we'll have to ask the professor."

CHAPTER III

ON BOARD THE STEAMER

When the boys presented themselves at Professor Strong's room at the Hotel Manhattan they found that worthy man looking over a number of purchases he had made while on his trip downtown.

"Glad to see you, boys," he said, as he shook one and another by the hand. "I trust you are all feeling well."

"Haven't been sick a minute this summer," answered Darry, and the others said about the same.

"I see you have your firearms with you," remarked Mark, as he gazed at a rifle and a double-barreled shotgun standing in a corner. "We were wondering if we were to go armed."

"I shouldn't feel at home without my guns," returned the professor with a smile. "You see that comes from being a confirmed old hunter. I don't anticipate any use for them except when I go hunting. As for your going armed, I have already arranged with your parents about that. I shall take

a shotgun for each, also a pistol, for use when we are in the wilds of the upper Orinoco."

"Will you lead us on a regular hunt?" asked Darry, eagerly.

"I will if you'll promise to behave and not get into unnecessary difficulties."

"We'll promise," came from all.

"I have been making a number of purchases," continued Professor Strong. "But I must make a number more, and if you wish you can go along and help me make the selections."

"Is Glummy—I mean is Jake Hockley coming up here?" questioned Mark.

"I expected him to come with you. Isn't he stopping with one of you?"

"No, he's stopping at the Astor House," came from Frank.

There was an awkward pause, which was very suggestive, and the professor noted it. With his gun in hand he faced the four.

"I'm afraid you do not care much to have Master Hockley along," he said, slowly.

"Oh, I reckon we can get along," answered Darry, after the others had failed to speak.

"It is unfortunate that you are not all the best of

friends. But Hockley asked me about the trip a long while ago and when it came to the point I could not see how I could refuse him. Besides that, I was thinking that perhaps the trip would do him good. I trust you will treat him fairly."

"Of course we'll do that," said Mark, slowly.

"I guess there won't be any trouble," said Frank, but deep in his heart he feared otherwise.

"Hockley has not had the benefits of much traveling," continued the professor. "And traveling broadens the mind. The trip will do us all good."

They were soon on their way to Fourteenth Street, and then Broadway, and at several stores the professor purchased the articles he had put down on his list. The boys all helped to carry these back to the hotel. On arriving they found Jake Hockley sitting in the reception room awaiting them.

The face of the lank youth fell when he saw that they had been out on a tour without him. "I'd been up earlier if you had sent me word," he said to the professor. "I suppose I've got to get a lot of things myself, haven't I?"

"You have your clothing, haven't you?—I mean the list I sent to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you are all right, for I have the other things."

From the professor the boys learned that the steamer for La Guayra, the nearest seaport to Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, would sail three days later.

"There is a sailing every ten days," said Professor Strong. "The steamers are not as large as those which cross the Atlantic but they are almost as comfortable, and I have seen to it that we shall have the best of the staterooms. The trip will take just a week, unless we encounter a severe storm which drives us back."

"I don't want to meet a storm," said Hockley.

"Afraid of getting seasick," came from Frank.

"Not exactly," snapped the lank youth. "Perhaps you'll get seasick yourself."

"Does this steamer belong to the only line running to Venezuela?" asked Sam.

"This is the only regular passenger line. There are other lines, carrying all sorts of freight, which run at irregular intervals, and then there are sailing vessels which often stop there in going up or down the coast."

The three days to follow passed swiftly, for at the

last moment the professor and the boys found plenty of things to do. On the day when the steamer was to sail, Sam's mother came down from Boston to see her son off, and the parents of Mark and Frank were also on hand, so that there was quite a family gathering. The baggage was already aboard, a trunk and a traveling case for each, as well as a leather bag for the guns and ammunition.

At last came the familiar cry, "All ashore that's going!" and the last farewells were said. A few minutes later the gang-plank was withdrawn and the lines unloosened. As the big steamer began to move, something like a lump arose in Frank's throat.

"We're off!" he whispered to Mark. "Guess it's going to be a long time before we get back."

Mark did not answer, for he was busy waving his handkerchief to his folks. Frank turned to Sam and saw that the tears were standing in the latter's eyes, for Sam had caught sight of his mother in the act of wiping her eyes. Even Darry and Hockley were unusually sober.

In quarter of an hour, however, the strain was over, and then the boys gave themselves up to the contemplation of the scene before them. Swiftly

the steamer was plying her way between the ferry boats and craft that crowded the stream. Soon the Battery was passed and the Statue of Liberty, and the tall buildings of the great metropolis began to fade away in the blue haze of the distance. The course was through the Narrows to the Lower Bay and then straight past Sandy Hook Light into the broad and sparkling Atlantic.

"Take a good look at the light and the highlands below," said the professor, as he sat beside the boys at the rail. "That's the last bit of United States territory you'll see for a long while to come—unless you catch sight of Porto Rico, which is doubtful."

"Won't we stand in to shore when we round Cape Hatteras?" asked Hockley.

"We shall not have to round Cape Hatteras, Hockley. Instead of hugging the eastern shore of the United States the steamer will sail almost due South for the Mona Passage on the west of Porto Rico. This will bring us into the Caribbean Sea, and then we shall sail somewhat westward for a brief stop at Curaçoa, a Dutch island north of the coast of Venezuela. It is not a large place but one of considerable importance. The submarine cable from Cuba to Venezuela has a station there."

"I'm going to study the map of Venezuela," said Mark. "I know something about it already, but not nearly as much as I'd like to."

"To-morrow I'll show you a large map of the country, which I have brought along," answered Professor Strong. "And I'll give you a little talk on the history of the people. But to-day you had better spend your time in making yourselves at home on the ship."

"I'm going to look at the engine room," said Frank, who was interested in machinery, and down he went, accompanied by Darry. It was a beautiful sight, to see the triple expansion engines working so swiftly and yet so noiselessly, but it was frightfully hot below decks, and they did not remain as long as they had anticipated.

They were now out of sight of land, and the long swells of the Atlantic caused the steamer to roll not a little. They found Sam huddled in a corner of the deck, looking as pale as a sheet.

"Hullo, what's up?" queried Frank, although he knew perfectly well.

"Nothing's up," was the reply, given with an effort. "But I guess there will be something up soon," and then Sam rushed off to his stateroom,

and that was the last seen of him for that day.

Mark was also slightly seasick, and thought best to lie down. Hockley was strolling the deck in deep contempt of those who had been taken ill.

"I can't see why anybody should get sick," he sneered. "I'm sure there's nothing to get sick about."

"Don't crow, Glum—I mean Jake," said Frank. "Your turn may come next."

"Me? I won't get sick."

"Don't be too sure."

"I'll bet you five dollars I don't get sick," insisted the lank youth.

"We're not betting to-day," put in Darry. "I hope you don't get sick, but—I wouldn't be too sure about it." And he and Frank walked away.

"What an awful blower he is," said Frank, when they were out of hearing. "As if a person could help being sick if the beastly thing got around to him. I must confess I don't feel very well myself."

"Nor I," answered Darry, more soberly than ever.

Dinner was served in the dining saloon at six o'clock, as elaborate a repast as at any leading hotel.

But though the first-class passengers numbered forty only a dozen came to the table. Of the boys only Frank and Hockley were present, and it must be confessed that Frank's appetite was very poor. Hockley appeared to be in the best of spirits and ate heartily.

"This is usually the case," said the professor, after having seen to it that the others were as comfortable as circumstances permitted. "But it won't last, and that is a comfort. Hockley, if I were you, I would not eat too heartily."

"Oh, it won't hurt me," was the off-hand answer. "The salt air just suits me. I never felt better in my life."

"I am glad to hear it, and trust it keeps on doing you good."

Frank and Mark had a stateroom together and so had Sam and Darry. Hockley had stipulated that he have a stateroom to himself, and this had been provided. The professor occupied a room with a Dutch merchant bound for Curaçao, a jolly, good-natured gentleman, who was soon on good terms with all of the party.

There was but little sleep for any of the boys during the earlier part of the night, for a stiff breeze was blowing and the steamer rolled worse than ever.

But by three o'clock in the morning the wind went down and the sea seemed to grow easier, and all fell into a light slumber, from which Mark was the first to awaken.

"I feel better, although pretty weak," he said, with an attempt at a smile. "How is it with you, Frank?"

"Oh, I didn't catch it very badly."

"Did Glummy get sick?"

"No."

"He's in luck. How he will crow over us."

"If he starts to crow we'll shut him up," answered Frank, firmly.

They were soon dressed and into the stateroom occupied by Sam and Darry.

"Thanks, I'm myself again," said Darry. "And why shouldn't I be? I'm so clean inside I feel fairly polished. I can tell you, there's nothing like a good dose of *mal de mer,* as the French call it, to turn one inside out."

"And how are you, Beans?" asked Mark.

"I think I'm all here, but I'm not sure," came from Sam. "But isn't it a shame we should all be sick and Hockley should escape?"

"Oh, he's so thick-skinned the disease can't strike through," returned Frank.

He had scarcely uttered the words when Darry, who had stepped out into the gangway between the staterooms came back with a peculiar smile on his face.

"He's got 'em," he said.

"He? Who? What has he got?" asked the others in a breath.

"Glummy. He's seasick, and he's in his room doing more groaning than a Scotch bagpipe. Come and listen. But don't make any noise."

Silently the quartet tiptoed their way out of the stateroom and to the door of the apartment occupied by Hockley. For a second there was silence. Then came a turning of a body on a berth and a prolonged groan of misery.

"Oh, why did I come out here," came from Hockley. "Oh dear, my head! Everything's going round and round! Oh, if only this old tub would stop rolling for a minute—just a minute!" And then came another series of groans, followed by sounds which suggested that poor Hockley was about as sick as a boy can well be.

"Let's give him a cheer, just to brace him up," suggested Frank, in a whisper.

"Just the thing," came from Darry. "My, but won't it make him boiling mad!"

But Mark interposed. "No, don't do it, fellows, he feels bad enough already. Come on and leave him alone," and this advice was followed and they went on deck. Here they met the professor, who wanted to know if they had seen Hockley.

"No, sir, but we heard him," said Sam. "He's in a bad way, and perhaps he'd like to see you."

At this Professor Strong's face became a study. Clearly he knew what was in the boys' minds, but he did not betray it. Yet he had to smile when he was by himself. He went to see Hockley, and he did not re-appear on deck until two hours later.

CHAPTER IV

VENEZUELA, PAST AND PRESENT

"SUPPOSING we now look at that map of Venezuela and learn a little about the history of the country," said Professor Strong, immediately after the lunch hour and when all was quiet on board the steamer. "We can get in a corner of the cabin, and I don't think anybody will disturb us."

Ordinarily the boys would not have taken to anything in the shape of a lecture, but they were anxious to know something more of the locality they were to visit, and so all readily agreed to follow Professor Strong to the nook he had selected. Hockley was still absent, and the others asked no questions concerning him. The professor hung up his map and sat on a chair before it, and the lads drew up camp chairs in a semi-circle before him.

"As you will see by the map, Venezuela lies on the north coast of South America," began Professor Strong. "It is bounded on the north by the Caribbean Sea, on the east by British Guiana, on the south

by Brazil and on the west by Colombia. It is irregular in shape, and its greatest length is from south-east to north-west, about twelve hundred miles, or by comparison, about the distance from Maine to Minnesota or California to Kansas."

"Phew! that's larger than I thought," came from Frank, in an undertone.

"Many of the South American republics are larger than most people realize," went on the professor. "Venezuela has an estimated area of nearly 598,000 miles—to give it in round figures. That is as large as all of the New England States and half a dozen other States combined. The country has over a thousand rivers, large and small, over two hundred of which flow into the Caribbean Sea, and four hundred helping to swell the size of the mighty Orinoco, which, as you already know, is the second largest river in South America,—the largest being the Amazon of Brazil. The Orinoco is a worthy rival of our own Mississippi, and I am afraid you will find it just as muddy and full of snags and bars."

"Never mind, we'll get through somehow," put in Darry, and his dry way of saying it made even the professor laugh.

"Besides the rivers, there are a number of lakes and bays. Of the former, the largest is Lake Maracaibo, with an area of 2,100 square miles."

"That must be the Maracaibo coffee district," suggested Mark.

"To a large extent it is, for the lake is surrounded by coffee and cocoa plantations. In the interior is another body of water, Lake Valencia, which possesses the peculiarity of being elevated nearly 1,700 feet above the ocean level. All told, the country is well watered and consequently vegetation is abundant."

"But I thought it was filled up with mountains?" came from Sam.

"A large part of the country is mountainous, as you can see by the map, but there are also immense plains, commonly called *llanos*. The great Andes chain strikes Venezuela on the west and here divides into two sections, one running northward toward the Caribbean Sea and the other to the north-eastward. Some parts of these chains are very high, and at a point about a hundred miles south of Lake Maracaibo there are two peaks which are each over 15,000 feet high and are perpetually covered with snow."

"I guess we won't climb them," observed Sam.

"I hardly think so myself, Samuel, although we may get a good view of them from a distance, when we visit Lake Maracaibo. Besides these chains of mountains there are others to the southward, and here the wilderness is so complete that it has not yet been thoroughly explored. It is a land full of mountain torrents, and one of these, after flowing through many plains and valleys, unites the Orinoco with the Amazon, although the watercourse is not fit for navigation by even fair sized boats."

"What about the people?" asked Mark, after a long pause, during which all of them examined the map more closely, and the professor pointed out La Guayra, Caracas, and a dozen or more other places of importance.

"The people are of Spanish, Indian and mixed blood, with a fair sprinkling of Americans and Europeans. There has been no accurate census taken for a number of years, but the population is put down as over two and three quarters millions and of this number about three hundred thousand are Indians."

"Are those Indians like our own?" questioned Darry.

"A great deal like the Indians of the old southwest, excepting that they are much more peaceful. You can travel almost anywhere in Venezuela, and if you mind your own business it is rarely that an Indian or a negro will molest you. And now let me ask if any of you know what the name Venezuela means?"

"I don't," said Frank, and the others shook their heads.

"The name Venezuela means Little Venice. The north shore was discovered by Columbus in 1498. One year later a Castilian knight named Ojeda came westward, accompanied by Amerigo Vespucci, and the pair with their four ships sailed from the mouth of the Orinoco to the Isthmus of Panama. They also explored part of Lake Maracaibo, and when Vespucci saw the natives floating around in their canoes it reminded him of Venice in Italy, with its canals and gondolas, and he named the country Little Venice, or Venezuela. When Vespucci got home he wrote an elaborate account of his voyage, and this so pleased those in authority they immedi-

ately called the entire country America, in his honor, and America it has been ever since."

"Yes, but it ought to be called Columbia," put in Frank, as the professor paused.

"Perhaps you are right, Newton, but it's too late to change it now. The Spaniards made the first settlement in Venezuela in 1520, and the country remained true to Spain until 1811. Ojeda was first made governor of all the north coast of South America, which soon took the name of the Spanish Main. Pearls were found in the Gulf of Paria, and the Spaniards at Santo Domingo rushed into South America and treated the innocent natives with the utmost cruelty. This brought on a fierce war lasting over forty years. This was in the times of Charles V, and he once sold the entire country to the Velsers of Augsburg, who treated the poor natives even worse than they had been treated by the Spaniards. In the end, between the fighting and the earthquakes which followed, the natives were either killed off or driven into the interior. Then came another Castilian knight, who in 1567 founded the city of Caracas, so called after the Indians who used to live there."

"I have often read stories of the Spanish Main," said Mark. "They must have been bloody times."

"They were, for piracy and general lawlessness were on every hand. The Spaniards ruled the people with a rod of iron, and everything that the country produced in the way of wealth went into the pockets of the rulers. At last the natives could stand it no longer, and a revolution took place, under the leadership of Simon Bolivar, and a ten years' war followed, and the Spanish soldiery was forced to leave the country.

"At first Venezuela, with New Granada, (now Colombia) and Ecuador formed the Republic of Colombia. Simon Bolivar, often called the George Washington of South America, was the President of the Republic. At Bolivar's death Venezuela became independent, and has remained independent ever since. Slavery was abolished there in 1854."

"They were ahead of us in that," observed Frank.

"So they were, and the credit is due to Jose Gregorio Monagas, who suffered a martyr's death in consequence. The freeing of the slaves threw the country into another revolution, and matters were not settled until 1870, when Antonio Guzman Banco

came into power and ruled until 1889. After this followed another series of outbreaks, one political leader trying to push another out of office, and this has hurt trade a good deal. At present General Castro is President of Venezuela, but there is no telling how long his enemies will allow him to retain that office."

"I hope we don't get mixed up in any of their revolutions," said Sam.

"I shouldn't mind it," put in Darry. "Anything for excitement, you know."

"Venezuela has been divided into many different states and territories at different times," continued Professor Strong. "In 1854 there were thirteen provinces which were soon after increased to twenty-one. In 1863 the Federalists conquered the Unionists, and the provinces were re-named states and reduced to seven. But this could not last, for fewer states meant fewer office holders, so the number was increased to twenty states, three territories and one federal district. What the present government will do toward making divisions there is no telling."

"I should think they would get tired of this continual fighting," said Darry.

"The peons, or common people, do get very tired

of it, but they cannot stop the ambitions of the political leaders, who have the entire soldiery under their thumb. These leaders have seen so much of fighting, and heard of so much fighting in their sister republics, that it seems to get in their blood and they can't settle down for more than a few years at a time. But as outsiders come in, with capital, and develop the country, I think conditions will change, and soon South America will be as stable as North America or Europe."

CHAPTER V

HOCKLEY MAKES A BOSOM FRIEND

"Now I feel as if I knew a little more than I did before," observed Frank to Mark, after the professor's talk had come to an end and the teacher had gone to put away his map. "It's a pretty big country, isn't it?"

"It is, Frank, and at the best I suppose we can see only a small portion of it. But it would be queer if we got mixed up in any of their fighting, wouldn't it?"

"Do you really think we shall?"

"I don't know. But just before we left New York I saw a long article in one of the newspapers about affairs in Venezuela, Colombia and on the Isthmus. It seems that the Presidents of the two Republics are unfriendly, and as a consequence the President of Venezuela has given aid to the rebels in Colombia, while the President of Colombia is doing what he can to foment trouble in Venezuela. Besides that Nicaragua and Ecuador are in the mix-up.

The papers said that fighting has been going on in some places for years and that thousands of lives have been lost, especially in the vicinity of the Isthmus."

"It's a wonder the professor didn't speak of this."

"Oh, I guess he didn't want to scare us. Perhaps the soldiery doesn't interfere with foreigners, if, as he says, the foreigners mind their own business."

The day was all that one could wish and the boys enjoyed it fully, for the seasickness of the day before had done each good. Mark and his chums wondered how Hockley was faring, and at last Sam went to the professor to inquire.

"He is a very sick young man," said Professor Strong. "His over-eating has much to do with it. But I hope to see him better in the morning."

"Do you think he would like to see any of us?" asked Sam. "We'll go willingly if you think best."

"No, he said he wished to see no one but myself, Winthrop. You will do best to let him alone, and when he comes out I wouldn't say anything about the affair," concluded the professor.

To while away the time the boys went over the steamer from end to end, and an obliging under-officer explained the engines, the steering gear and

other things of interest to them. So the time passed swiftly enough until it was again the hour to retire.

Hockley appeared about ten o'clock on the following morning, thinner than ever and with big rings under his eyes. He declined to eat any breakfast and was content to sit by himself in a corner on deck.

"I suppose you fellows think I was seasick," he said, as Sam and Darry passed close to him. "But if you do, you are mistaken. I ate something that didn't agree with me and that threw me into a regular fit of biliousness. I get them every six months or so, you know."

"I didn't know," returned Darry, who had never seen Hockley sick in his life. "But I'm glad you are over it," he went on, kindly.

"I suppose Frank and Mark are laughing in their sleeves at me," went on the lank youth, with a scowl.

"I don't believe they are thinking of it," answered Sam. "We've been inspecting the ship from top to bottom and stem to stern, and that has kept us busy. You ought to go around, it's really very interesting."

"Pooh! I've been through 'em loads of times—

on the regular Atlantic liners,—twice as big as this," grumbled Hockley.

A few words more followed, and Sam and Darry passed on. "He's all right again," observed Darry. "And his seasickness didn't cure him of his bragging either."

The steamer was now getting well down toward the Mona Passage, and on the day following land was sighted in the distance, a series of somewhat barren rocks. A heavy wind was blowing.

"Now we are going to pass through the monkey," said Darry, after a talk with the professor.

"Pass through the monkey?" repeated Frank. "Is this another of your little jokes, Darry?"

"Not at all. Mona means monkey, so the professor told me."

"Will we stop?"

"No, we won't go anywhere near land. The next steamer stops, I believe, but not this one."

"I wouldn't mind spending some time in Porto Rico and Cuba," put in Mark. "There must have been great excitement during the war with Spain."

"Perhaps we'll stop there on our way home," said Sam. "I should like to visit Havana."

The Mona Passage, or Strait, passed, the course

of the steamer was changed to the southwestward. They were now in the Caribbean Sea, but the waters looked very much as they had on the bosom of the Atlantic. The wind increased until the blow promised to be an unusually severe one.

"My, but this wind is a corker!" ejaculated Frank, as he and Mark tried in vain to walk the open deck. "Perhaps we are going to have a hurricane."

"You boys had better come inside," said Professor Strong as he hurried up. "It's not safe to be here. A sudden lurch of the steamer might hurl you overboard."

"All right, we'll come in," said Mark.

He had scarcely spoken when an extra puff of wind came along, banging the loose things in the open cabin right and left. The wind took Frank's cap from his head and sent it spinning aft.

"My cap!" cried the youth and started after it.

"Be careful of yourself!" came from the professor, but the fury of the wind drowned out his voice completely.

Bound to save his cap Frank followed it to the rail. As he stooped to pick it up the steamer gave a sudden roll to the opposite side and he was thrown

"Stay where you are!"

headlong. At the same moment the spray came flying on board, nearly blinding him.

"He'll go overboard if he isn't careful!" ejaculated Mark, and ran after his chum.

"You be careful yourself," came from Professor Strong, as he too rushed to the rescue.

Before either could reach Frank the youth had turned over and was trying to raise himself to his feet. But now the steamer rolled once more and in a flash Frank was thrown almost on top of the rail. He caught the netting below with one hand but his legs went over the side.

"Oh!" burst out Mark, and could say no more, for his heart was in his throat. He thought Frank would be washed away in a moment more. The spray still continued to fly all over the deck and at times his chum could scarcely be seen.

"Stay where you are," called out Professor Strong, to Mark. Then he turned and in a moment more was at the rail and holding both Frank and himself. Following the advice given, Mark held fast to a nearby window.

By this time a couple of deck hands were hurrying to the scene, one with a long line. One end of the line was fastened to the companionway rail and

the other run out to where the professor and Frank remained. The boy was all out of breath and could do but little toward helping himself. But Professor Strong's grip was a good one, and it did not relax until one of the deck hands helped the lad to a place along the rope. The deck hand went ahead and the professor brought up the rear, with Frank between them. In a moment more they were at the companionway and Frank fairly tumbled below, with the others following him.

"Gracious, but that was a close shave!" panted the boy, when able to speak. "I hadn't any idea the steamer would roll so much."

"After this when it blows heavily you must remain in the cabin," said Professor Strong, rather severely. "And if your cap wants to go overboard—"

"I'll let it go," finished Frank. "I won't do anything like that again for a train load of caps, you can depend on that."

The storm increased, and by nightfall it was raining heavily. The boys had expected a good deal of thunder and lightning, but it did not come, and by sunrise wind and rain were a thing of the past and

the steamer was pursuing her course as smoothly as ever.

On board the ship were half a dozen passengers bound for Curaçao, including Herr Dombrich, the merchant who occupied a portion of Professor Strong's stateroom. One of the number going ashore at the little island was a man from Baltimore, a fellow with Dutch blood in his veins, who had formerly been in the saloon business, and who was far from trustworthy. His name was Dan Markel, and, strange as it may seem, he had formed a fairly close acquaintanceship with Jake Hockley.

"I wish I had the money you have," said Dan Markel to Hockley, one afternoon, as the two were sitting alone near the bow of the steamer. "There are lots of openings in Curaçao for a fellow with a little capital. The Dutchmen down there don't know how to do business. With five hundred dollars I could make ten thousand in less than a year."

"Haven't you got five hundred dollars?" asked Hockley, with interest.

"Not now. I had a good deal more than that, but I was burnt out, and there was a flaw in my insurance papers, so I couldn't get my money from the

company." Dan Markel told the falsehood without a blush.

"But what do you expect to do in Curaçao without money—strike some sort of job?"

"I've got a rich friend, who has a plantation in the interior. I think he will give me a place. But I'd rather establish myself in the town. He wrote to me that there was a good opening for a tobacco shop. If I could get somebody to advance me five hundred dollars I'd be willing to pay back a thousand for it at the end of six months."

Now Hockley was carrying five hundred dollars with him, which an indulgent father had given to him for "extras," as he expressed it, for Professor Strong was to pay all regular bills. The money was in gold, for gold is a standard no matter where you travel. Hockley thought of this gold, and of how he would like it to be a thousand instead of five hundred dollars.

"I've got five hundred dollars with me," he said, in his bragging way. "My father gave it to me to have a good time on."

"Then you must be rich," was the answer from the man from Baltimore.

"Dad's a millionaire," said Hockley, trying to

put on an air of superiority. "Made every cent of it himself, too."

"I suppose you've got to pay your way with the money."

"No, old Strong pays the bills."

"Then you're in luck. I suppose you don't want to put that money out at a hundred per cent. interest," went on Dan Markel, shrewdly. "It would be as safe as in a bank, my word on it."

"I want to use the money, that's the trouble. I intend to have a good time in Venezuela."

"You ought to have it, on that money. I wish I had your chance. Caracas is a dandy city for sport, if you know the ropes."

"Then you have been there?"

"Yes, four years ago," answered Markel, and this was another falsehood, for he had never been near South America in his life. He had spent his time in drifting from one city in the United States to another, invariably leaving a trail of debts behind him.

"And you know the people?"

"Yes, some of the very best of them. And I can show you the best of the cock fighting and the bull fighting, too, if you want to see them."

"That's what I want," answered Hockley, his eyes brightening. "No old slow poke of a trip for me. I suppose Professor Strong expects to make us toe the mark everywhere we go, but I don't intend to stand it. I came for a good time, and if I can't get it with the rest of the party I'm going to go it on my own hook."

"To be sure—that's just what I'd do." Dan Markel slapped Hockley on the back. "Hang me if you ain't a young man after my own heart. For two pins I'd go down to Caracas with you, just to show you around."

"I wish you would!" cried Hockley.

"The trouble is while I can spare the time I can't spare the money. I'd take you up in a minute if it wasn't for that."

"Never mind the money—I'll foot the bill," answered Hockley, never dreaming of how his offer would result. "I'd like to have a companion who had been around and who knew where the real sport lay. You come with me, and you can return to Curaçao after our crowd leaves Caracas."

A talk of half an hour followed. Markel pretended to be unwilling to accept the generous offer at first, but at length agreed to go with Hockley and

remain with him so long as the Strong party stopped at Caracas. He was to show Hockley all the "fancy sports" of the town and introduce him to a number of swells and "high rollers." On the strength of the compact he borrowed fifty dollars on the spot, giving his I. O. U. in exchange, a bit of paper not worth the ink used in drawing it up.

CHAPTER VI

A PLAN THAT FAILED

"HOCKLEY has found a new friend," observed Mark to Sam that afternoon. "A man a number of years older than himself, too."

"So I've noticed, Mark. I must say I don't quite fancy the appearance of the stranger."

"Nor I. He looks rakish and dissipated. I wonder where he is bound?"

"I heard him speaking about getting off at Curaçao. If that's the case we won't have him with us after to-morrow."

"Do we stop at the island to-morrow?"

"Yes, we'll be there before noon, so the professor says."

Just then Darry appeared and joined them. He had been in the cabin, and Hockley had introduced Dan Markel to him.

"Mr. Markel is a great talker, but I don't take stock in much he says," said Darry. "Hockley

evidently thinks him just all right. He was going to stop at Curaçao but has changed his mind and is going right through to Caracas. He says he knows Caracas like a book."

"Perhaps he intends to take Hockley around," suggested Sam.

"It was my impression we were all to go around with the professor," came from Mark.

"That was the plan," said Darry. "He'd have a good deal of bother if he allowed everyone to run off where he pleased. I don't believe Hockley liked it much because I didn't seem to care for his new friend."

"Let him think as he pleases—we haven't got to put ourselves out for his benefit," said Mark; and there the subject was dropped for the time being.

In the meantime Frank had met Hockley and Dan Markel coming out of the stateroom the latter occupied. Markel had asked the lank youth to come below and take a drink with him, and Hockley had accepted, and a first drink had been followed by two more, which put Hockley in rather an "elevated" state of mind, even though he was used to drinking moderately when at home.

"My very best friend, Frank," he called out.

"Mr. Dan Markel. Mr. Markel, this is one of our party, Frank Newton, of New York city."

"Happy to know you," responded Markel, giving Frank's hand a warm shake. "It's a real pleasure to make friends on such a lonely trip as this."

"I haven't found it particularly lonely," said Frank, stiffly. He was not favorably impressed by the appearance of the man from Baltimore.

"That's because you have so many friends with you, my boy. With me it was different. I didn't know a soul until Mr. Hockley and myself struck up an acquaintanceship."

"But now it's all right, eh?" put in Hockley, gripping Markel's shoulder in a brotherly way.

"To be sure it's all right," was the quick answer. "We'll stick together and have a good time. Perhaps young Newton will join us?"

"Thank you, but I shall stick to my chums," answered Frank, coolly, and walked off, leaving Markel staring after him.

"The little beggar!" muttered Hockley, when Frank was out of hearing. "I'd like to wring his neck for him."

"Why, what's the trouble?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, but somehow he and

the rest of the crowd seem to be down on me, and they are making it as unpleasant as they can at every opportunity."

"You don't say! It's a wonder Professor Strong permits it."

"They take good care to be decent when he's around, and of course I'm no tale bearer, to go to him. But I would like to fix young Newton."

"Is he worse than the others?"

"Sometimes I think he is. Anyway, if I got square on him it might teach the others a lesson."

Frank joined his chums and told what had taken place. At the next meal Markel was introduced to the others, but all ignored him; and even Professor Strong showed that he did not like the idea of Hockley picking up such an acquaintance

The fact that he had been snubbed made Dan Markel angry, and feeling that Hockley was now his friend and would back him up, he let out a stream of abuse, in the privacy of his stateroom, with the lank youth taking it in and nodding vigorously.

"You are right, that little cub is the worst," said Markel, referring to Frank. "He needs taming down. I wish I had him under my care for a week or two, I'd show him how to behave."

"I've been thinking of an idea," retorted Hockley, slowly. "It would be a grand scheme if we could put it through."

"What is it?"

"We are going to land at Curaçao to-morrow. I wish I could arrange it so one of the other fellows would be left behind to paddle his own canoe. It would take some of the importance out of him."

"Well, that might be arranged," returned Markel, rubbing his chin reflectively. "Perhaps we might fix it so that all of them were left there stranded."

"How long will the steamer stay there?"

"Six hours, so I heard the captain tell one of the other passengers."

"The trouble is we'll all have to go ashore with the professor, if they let us go ashore at all."

"Well, we'll try to think up some scheme," said the man from Baltimore; and then the subject was changed.

Curaçao is the largest and most important of the Dutch West Indian Islands, with a population of about 25,000 souls. The island is largely of a phosphate nature, and the government derives a hand-

some income from the sale of this product. To the east of Curaçao is Bonaire, another Dutch possession, and to the west Aruba, all of which are likely to become a part of United States territory in the near future. The islands are of considerable importance, and trade not alone in phosphate of lime but also in salt, beans, dyewoods and fruits.

Early in the morning the dim outlines of Curaçao could be seen and about ten o'clock the steamer glided into the bay of St. Anna, upon which Willemstad, the capital city is located. The harbor is a commodious one, and ships displaying the flags of many nations were on every hand.

"What a pretty town!" exclaimed Mark, as he surveyed the distant shore with a glass. "I declare it looks like some of these old Dutch paintings."

"This island is famous in history," said Professor Strong, who stood by. "It was discovered by the Spaniards in 1527. About a hundred years after that the Dutch took it and held it for nearly two hundred years. Then the English came over and wrested it from the Dutch, but had to give it back eight years later, in 1815. The pirates and

buccaneers used to find these islands excellent stopping places, and many a political refugee has ended his days on them."

"Is the capital very large?"

"About fifteen thousand inhabitants."

"How about going ashore and taking a look around?" questioned Darry. "I'd like first rate to stretch my legs on land once more."

"Oh, yes, do let us go ashore?" pleaded Frank. "The steamer is going to stay five or six hours, and that will give us loads of time for looking around."

"I will see what can be done when we anchor," said the professor. "They may be very strict here —I do not know."

Soon the big steamer was close up to the wharf where she was to discharge part of her cargo and passengers. One of the first parties to leave was Herr Dombrich, who shook hands cordially with the professor.

"It has been von great bleasure to sail mit you," said the Dutch merchant. "I vos hobe ve meet again, not so?"

"I'm thinking of taking the boys ashore," said the professor. "They would like to see the city."

"Yes, yes, surely you must do dot," was the reply. "I vould go mit you, but I must on pisiness go to de udder side of de island. Goot py!" and in a moment Herr Dombrich was ashore and lost in a crowd. Then Mark caught a glimpse of him as he was driven away in an old fashioned Dutch carriage which had been waiting for him.

An interview was had with some custom house and other officials, and the party obtained permission to go ashore and roam around the place until the steamer should set sail for La Guayra. In the meantime Dan Markel had already disappeared up one of the long docks.

The man from Baltimore was in a quandary. He had borrowed fifty dollars from Hockley, and he was strongly inclined to hide until the steamer should sail and then use the money to suit himself. But he realized that his capital, which now represented a total of eighty dollars, would not last forever, and a brief look around Willemstad convinced him that it was not at all the city he had anticipated.

"I'd starve to death here, after the money was gone," he reasoned. "I'll wager these Dutchmen are regular misers. The best thing I can do is to go

to Caracas with that crowd and then squeeze that young fool out of another fifty, or maybe a couple of hundred."

He had come ashore after another talk with Hockley, in which he had promised to lay some plan whereby one or another of the boys might be left behind. He had been told by the captain of the steamer that the vessel would sail at five o'clock sharp. If he could only manage to keep somebody ashore until ten or fifteen minutes after that hour the deed would be done.

The day was hot and, as was usual with him, Markel was dry, and he entered the first wine shop he discovered. Here he imbibed freely, with the consequence that when he arose to go his mind was far from being as free as it had been.

"I guess I'll go and see a little more of the town on my own hook before I try to make any arrangements," he muttered to himself, and strolled on until another drinking place presented itself. Here he met another American, and the pair threw dice for drinks for over an hour. Then the man from Baltimore dozed off in a chair, and did not awaken until a number of hours later.

CHAPTER VII

FROM CURAÇAO TO LA GUAYRA

LEAVING the steamer, our friends proceeded to the main thoroughfare of Willemstad, a quaint old street, scrupulously clean—a characteristic of every Dutch town—and with buildings that looked as if they had been moved over from Amsterdam. Not far off was the home of the governor of the island, a mansion with walls of immense thickness. The place fronted the bay and near by was something of a fortress with a few ancient cannon. Here a number of Dutch soldiers were on duty.

"I will see if I cannot get carriages, and then we can drive around," said Professor Strong, and this was done, and soon they were moving along slowly, for no Dutch hackman ever thinks of driving fast. Besides it was now the noon hour, and the hackmen would rather have taken their midday nap than earn a couple of dollars. The boys soon discovered that in the tropics to do anything, or to have anything done for you, between the hours of eleven to three

is extremely difficult. Merchants close their places of business and everybody smokes and dreams or goes to sleep.

"I see a lot of negroes," observed Mark, as they moved along.

"The population is mostly of colored blood," answered the professor. "The colored people are all free, yet the few Dutchmen that are here are virtually their masters. The negroes work in the phosphate mines, and their task is harder than that of a Pennsylvania coal miner ten times over. If we had time we might visit one of the phosphate works, but I hate to risk it."

"For such a small place there are lots of ships here," put in Sam.

"That is true and I think the reason is because this is a free port of entry. The ships bring in all sorts of things, and some say a good deal of the stuff is afterwards smuggled into Venezuela and Colombia."

They drove on, past the quaint shops and other buildings, but in an opposite direction to that taken by Dan Markel. During the drive Hockley had little or nothing to say. He was worried over the non-appearance of the man from Baltimore, and

looked for him eagerly at every corner and cross road.

"He's made a mess of it," he thought. "We'll be driving back soon and that will be the end of it." And then he thought of the fifty dollars and began to suspect Markel, and something like a chill passed over him.

"If he cheated me I'll fix him, see if I don't!" he told himself. Yet he felt that he was helpless and could do nothing, for the loan had been a fair one.

"There is a curious story connected with the Island of Curaçao," said the professor, as they passed along through the suburbs of the capital. "It is said that in years gone by some of the old Spanish pirates filled a cave in the interior with gold and then sprinkled a trail of salt from the cave to the sea. Some time after that the pirates were captured and all made to walk the plank. One of them, in an endeavor to save his life, told of the treasure and of the trail that had been left. Those who had captured the pirates immediately sailed for the island, but before they could reach here a fearful hurricane came up, washing the land from end to end and entirely destroying the trail of salt, so that the treasure has not been unearthed to this day."

For the greater part the road was hard, dusty and unshaded. But in spots were beautiful groves of plantains and oranges, while cocoanut palms were by no means lacking. The houses everywhere were low, broad, and with walls of great thickness, and in between them were scattered the huts of the poorer class, built of palm thatch and often covered with vines.

On the return they passed an old Dutch saw-mill, where a stout Dutchman was directing the labors of a dozen coal-black natives. The natives droned a tune as they moved the heavy logs into the mill. They appeared to be only half awake, and the master threatened them continually in an endeavor to make them move faster.

"They are not killing themselves with work," observed Sam.

"They never work as fast in the tropics as they do in the temperate zone of our own country," answered Professor Strong. "The heat is against it. Even the most active of men are apt to become easy-going after they have been here a number of years."

The drive took longer than anticipated and when they again reached the docks the steamer was ready to sail. They were soon on board, and a little later

St. Anna harbor was left behind and the journey to Venezuela was resumed.

"What's up?" asked Mark, of Hockley, when he saw the lank youth walking through the cabins looking in one direction and another. "Lost anything?"

"No," was the curt answer, and then with a peculiar look in his eyes, Hockley continued: "Have you seen anything of Mr. Markel since we came on board?"

"I have not. He got off at Willemstad."

"I know it. But he was going through to La Guayra and Caracas."

"Well, I haven't seen him," answered Mark, and moved on.

Hockley continued his search for over an hour and then went to the purser, and from that individual learned that Markel had taken no stateroom for the coming night nor had he paid passage money to be carried to La Guayra.

"That settles it," muttered Hockley to himself, as he walked off. "He has given me the slip and I am out my fifty dollars. What a fool I was to trust him! And I thought he was such a fine fellow!" And he gripped his fists in useless rage.

He fancied that he had seen the last of the man from Baltimore, but he was mistaken.

That night the boys went to bed full of expectations for the morrow, for the run from Curaçao to La Guayra, the nearest seaport to Caracas, is but a short one.

"My, but it's getting hot!" observed Frank, while undressing. "It's more than I bargained for."

"You must remember we are only twelve degrees north of the equator," answered Mark. "Wait till we strike the Orinoco, then I guess you'll do some sweating. That stream is only about seven or eight degrees above the line."

Nevertheless the boys passed a fairly comfortable night and did not arise until it was time for breakfast. Then they went on deck to watch for the first sight of land.

"Hurrah! There's land!" was Darry's cry, some hours later. He held a glass in his hand. "My, what a mountain!"

One after another looked through the glass, and at a great distance made out a gigantic cliff overhanging the sea. As the steamer came closer they made out the wall more plainly, and saw the lazy

clouds drifting by its top and between its clefts. At the foot of the gigantic cliff was a narrow patch of sand with here and there a few tropical trees and bushes. Upon the sand the breakers rushed with a low, booming sound, and in spots they covered the rocks with a milklike foam.

"I don't see anything of a town," said Frank.

"We have got to round yonder point before you can see it," answered an under-officer standing near. "It's not much of a place, and it's tucked away right under the mountain."

An hour later they rounded the point that had been mentioned and at a distance made out La Guayra, which is located on a narrow strip of land between the great cliff and the sea. They could see but little outside of several long and narrow streets running parallel with the mountain. At one end of the town was a small hill, with several long, low government buildings and a church or two.

"When I was here before, one had to be taken ashore in a small boat," said Professor Strong. "The ocean ran with great swiftness along the beach. But now they have a breakwater and some first-class docks and there is little trouble."

"The town seems to be hemmed in," said Sam. "How do they get anywhere excepting by boat?"

"There is a road over the mountain and a railroad track, too. But it's uphill climbing from beginning to end."

"What's that thing on yonder hillside?" asked Mark, pointing to a somewhat dilapidated building, one side of which was set up on long sticks.

"That is the old bull fighting ring. In days gone by they used to have very fierce fights there and much money used to be wagered on the contests. But the folks are beginning to become civilized now and the bull fighting doesn't amount to much."

As soon as the passengers had landed from the steamer they found themselves in the hands of the custom house officials, who proceeded to collect all they thought was due. In the meantime, while the professor was busy paying the duties, Mark and the others strolled through the little park fronting the pier.

"This isn't so bad," said Frank, as he gazed at the fountain and the heroic statue of General Guzman Blanco. "Wonder what that big building behind us is."

It proved to be the custom house, an ancient

building looking for all the world like a fort. There was a heavy wall, with an arched gateway and a great staircase leading to the rooms in the upper part of the building. The walls were of huge stones and were five to six feet in thickness.

"Whoever built this, built it to last," said Sam. "I don't think anything less than an earthquake could bring it down."

"I suppose they have used it for a fort for years," said Darry, and he hit the truth exactly. "When there is a rebellion in a country the custom house is always more or less of a point of interest."

They were soon joined by Professor Strong, who conducted them to a modest looking hotel not many squares away.

"We will remain here over night and take the train for Caracas in the morning," said the professor. "I want you to see what a triumph of engineering skill this road is, and you can't see that in the darkness."

"Phew! what a smell!" came from Hockley, as he turned up his nose. "La Guayra isn't very clean."

"You are right, Hockley, although the town is much better than it used to be. When I was here

years ago the streets were literally covered with filth and there was a good deal of sickness. You see, it is really nothing but a seaport. Only those who have to work here will stay."

Their rooms were not of the best, and during the night Frank got up several times, declaring that his bed was inhabited. All were outside by dawn and saw the sun rise over the rolling sea. Then a breakfast of rolls, coffee and fish was had and they proceeded to the railroad station—to take the most exciting railroad ride that they had ever experienced.

CHAPTER VIII

ON A CLIFF AND UNDER

"HURRAH for a railroad ride over the mountains!" cried Darry, as they proceeded to the station. "Wonder how long it will be?"

"Twenty-four miles, so the professor said," responded Sam. "He said Caracas is only six miles away and the mule path isn't over nine miles long. But the lowest part of the mountain is nearly a mile high and the train has to do a lot of twisted traveling to get over it."

"Wonder they wouldn't tunnel the mountain," suggested Frank.

"That's what they are talking of doing," put in Hockley, who felt just then like being sociable. "Somebody has got a franchise, but it's going to take millions of dollars.".

The professor had been looking after tickets. He soon returned and when the train came along they all got in the first-class compartment, which was not

much better than a very ordinary car at home. The car sat so close to the rails that the tops of the wheels had to be bridged over, interfering somewhat with the seating capacity.

Soon came a long whistle, the conductor waved his hand and the train moved away, through the town and in full view of the ocean. The speed was fair, but nothing to what the boys were used to at home, yet this was not to be wondered at, for they were climbing steadily along the face of the mountain. Up and up they went until Frank, who sat at a window overlooking the water hundreds of feet below, could not help but shudder.

"If we should drop off here, there wouldn't be anything left of us," he said to Sam.

"I guess we won't drop off," was the reply. "But say, it does make a fellow dizzy to look down, doesn't it?"

The professor sat with them and pointed out several places of interest as they sped onward. "You see the tracks follow the mule road in many places. The path is about nine miles long and in former days it was the only means of communication between Caracas and the sea, outside of an old Indian trail further to our right."

They soon dashed into a tunnel and out again, and then began another climb along the mountain side. As they reached a higher elevation they noticed that the air was cooler.

"We are coming to another tunnel," said Mark, as they swung around a sharp curve.

"Yes, and we're running swifter than before," put in Sam.

The next instant found them in the tunnel, rushing past great masses of black rocks. Nothing but smoky lamps lit up the car and Mark was gazing at one of these, when of a sudden the train came to such a short stop that everybody was pitched forward.

"We've struck something," cried Darry, as he scrambled up from the floor, to which he had been hurled.

"Is anybody hurt?" came anxiously from Professor Strong, as soon as the shock was over and the car came to a standstill.

"I pinched my hand on the seat," answered Mark. "But it doesn't amount to anything."

The passengers were climbing out of the train, to learn the cause of the sudden stoppage. They found the train hands gathering about the engine

and with them was a track-walker who had given them the signal to stop.

"There has been a cave-in ahead, he says," said Professor Strong, after listening to the track-walker. "If the train hadn't stopped we might all have been killed."

The track-walker talked excitedly, in Spanish and in broken English, and some of the party went ahead to inspect the cave-in. A large mass of rocks had fallen and it was easy to see that the track would not be cleared for several hours.

"Now what's to do?" grumbled Hockley. "I'm sure I don't want to stay boxed up in this tunnel till they clear that stuff away."

"I don't see what else we can do," answered Sam, "unless we walk all the way back to La Guayra."

"How far are we from Caracas?" asked Mark, of one of the passengers.

"About three miles," was the answer.

"Can't we walk to that place?" asked Mark, of Professor Strong. "We have nothing but our little shoulder valises to carry."

"I think we can walk it," said the professor. "I will ask how the track ahead is."

He did so and was informed that, so far as the

track-walker knew, it was all clear. Accordingly they started out, the professor and Mark leading the way and the others following close behind.

They were in the shadow of the mountain so that the fierce rays of the sun did not reach them. They had left the tallest portion of the mountain behind, so the way was now all more or less down grade.

"I move we get off the railroad track and rest," said Hockley, after half a mile had been covered. "We're in no especial hurry to get to Caracas."

The professor and the others were willing, and leaving the track they found shelter along a hillside covered with tropical trees and bushes. As they stepped away from the railroad they heard a humming sound and saw a handcar approaching, filled with men and tools, bound for the scene of the cave-in.

"They must have telegraphed for those fellows," said Darry. "They will get the road into shape again in short order."

It was very pleasant to lie under the trees in the shade, and Frank was so sleepy that he soon dropped into a doze. Mark walked around inspecting the surroundings, and to get a better outlook climbed a small cliff which arose not far away.

From the elevation of the cliff Mark could get a good view of the valley stretching out in the direction of Caracas and could even see some of the white buildings in the distance. Then the youth walked along the cliff to where there was a turn, around a series of rough rocks.

There had been a heavy dew on the mountain the night before and in the shady spots this had not yet dried off. As he made the turn his foot trod in some moisture and slipped, and down he went on his knee. He tried to save himself by clutching at some vines but these gave way and over the cliff he plunged on to some loose rocks below.

Fortunately for Mark, the fall was not a deep one or some bones might have been broken. The loose stones and earth gave way beneath his weight and allowed him to slide swiftly under the cliff into a long and narrow hollow. Here he went with a splash into some water up to his knees and some of the dirt and stones came after him, sending the moisture all over him.

Mark was so surprised at the turn of affairs that for the moment he stood perfectly still, panting for breath. It was dark around him, the only light

coming from the opening above, which was fully a dozen feet over his head. In front of him was the rocky cliff raising itself in a curve over his head. Behind him was the wall of dirt. The split, if such it may be called, extended a dozen feet in one direction and out of sight in the other.

"Now I'm in a pickle and no mistake," he muttered, dismally. "How in the world am I going to get out of this hole?"

The question could not be answered at once and Mark waited until he had got back some of his breath. Then he started to move off in the direction in which the split led.

He soon found that he was on an uncertain footing, for he had progressed less than a dozen feet when he began to sink into the pasty ooze of which the bottom of the opening was composed. The water was above his knees here and growing deeper.

"No use trying in that direction," he told himself. "If there was an opening the water wouldn't stand there like that. It's a regular pocket and if I'm not careful I'll plaster myself so fast that I'll never get out."

He thought to cry for help but then realized that

his friends were a good distance off and that even if they heard him they would not know exactly how to reach the opening.

"I must help myself," he murmured. "Surely I ought to be able to climb that wall of dirt somehow. Wonder if my pocketknife won't help me?"

He brought forth the knife and dug the blade into the soil among the stones. But it would not hold and merely brought down more of the wall at his feet. Then, without warning a big mass of dirt came down, hurling him to the bottom of the pocket and covering him completely.

A big mass of dirt came down.

CHAPTER IX

HOCKLEY SHOWS HIS TRUE COLORS

Professor Strong had been studying a guide book which he carried. Presently he closed the volume, put it into his pocket, and leaped to his feet.

"Come, boys, I think we had better be on our way."

"I'm ready," answered Darry, and aroused Frank.

Hockley was close at hand, throwing stones at some birds in a neighboring tree. Now he stopped and walked over to the railroad track.

"Where is Mark?"

Several asked the question at the same time, and all looked around for their companion.

"I saw him walking towards yonder cliff last," said Sam. "But that was some time ago."

"Hullo, Mark!" cried Frank. "Where are you?"

No answer came back, and the cry was repeated by Darry and Sam. Then the professor shouted,

with all the strength of his lungs. Still there was no reply.

"This is very strange," observed the professor, with a serious look on his face. "I trust he hasn't gotten into any trouble. You are sure you saw him going toward the cliff, Winthrop?"

"Yes, sir, directly after Frank went to sleep."

"I'll go over and take a look around."

"Let me go with you, please," said Frank, and he followed and so did Sam and Darry. Hockley sat down on the railroad embankment to await their return.

Sam pointed out the spot where he had last seen Mark and it did not take the crowd long to reach that vicinity. All looked around anxiously.

"He isn't here, that's sure," said Professor Strong. "It's a mystery what became of him."

"Perhaps he fell over into the bushes below," suggested Darry.

At this Frank, who loved Mark as a brother, gave a shiver and crawled to the edge. But there was nothing below but dirt and tropical vines, the latter overrun with big spiders.

"Mark! Mark!" he shouted, and again the others joined in the cry.

"Hark! I heard something!" exclaimed Sam, who had walked nearest to the rough rocks where Mark had first slipped. "Listen."

All did so, with bated breath. A low groan reached their ears, sounding as if it had come from the bowels of the earth.

"It's Mark! He's surely had a fall!" gasped Frank. He raised his voice: "Mark! Mark! Where are you?"

"Here, under the cliff," was the faint answer, and another groan followed.

"Under the cliff?" repeated Professor Strong. He crawled to the edge and looked around as Frank had done. "I see no opening, do you?"

"No, sir."

"The cries come from further up the cliff, in that direction," said Sam, whose ears seemed to be more acute than the rest. "Listen! I think he must be in some hole over yonder."

The professor hurried toward the rough rocks and was soon climbing around them. But he was more careful than Mark had been and made the turn in safety. He now found himself on another portion of the cliff and Mark's groans came from directly beneath him.

"Mark!" he called out. "Are you below there?"

"I am," was the answer.

"Are you much hurt?"

"My ankle got a bad twist and I was almost smothered by some dirt covering me."

The professor said no more just then but tried to look over the edge of the cliff into the hollow. In this, however, he was unsuccessful.

But Professor Strong was not a man to be daunted easily. When out on hunting expeditions he had at various times, gotten into positions of extreme peril, and he was used to taking risks. Measuring the distance to the dirt hill in front of the cliff, he took a leap and landed in safety. He was careful not to go too close to the hole so there was no caving-in as there had been when Mark descended.

"Now, then, I'll see if I can help you out," said the professor, when he caught sight of the youth resting on top of the dirt that had last fallen.

"Be careful, or you'll slide down, too," answered Mark. "That bank is awfully treacherous."

Leaving the vicinity of the opening Professor

Strong began to hunt for something by which Mark might be hauled up. But nothing was at hand.

"Have you found him?" came from Frank.

"Yes. He is at the bottom of a deep opening. I will have to haul him out if I can find anything to do it with."

"If only we had a rope," came from Darry.

Each looked around in perplexity.

"Might try some of the vines by twisting them together," suggested Frank.

"The vines growing around here are not strong enough," called back the professor.

At that moment came a slight rumble from the railroad and at a distance another handcar hove into sight, containing several laborers with their tools.

"Hi! stop that handcar!" called out Frank to Hockley, who had arisen to watch the car pass.

"What for?" demanded the lank youth.

"The professor wants a rope."

"Stop the car yourself," muttered Hockley. Nevertheless, when the car came near, he waved his hand for the men to stop working the handles which kept it in motion.

"What do you want?" asked one of the men, in a Spanish patois, after the handcar had been brought to a standstill.

"We want a rope," said Hockley, without understanding the man.

The man shrugged his shoulders and so did his companions. Then Hockley pointed to a rope which laid coiled up on the car. At this the native smiled, then looked perplexed.

By this time Professor Strong was hurrying in the direction. He could speak the language fairly well and soon made them understand that somebody was in a hole and had to be hauled out. Then he held a silver piece out and the native, who was a sort of foreman, took it instantly. The handcar was taken from the tracks and all the workmen followed the professor to the hill in front of the cliff.

When Mark was brought up and placed on the grass, it was found that his ankle was so swollen that walking was out of the question. He was wet and dirty from head to foot and the others did what they could toward cleaning him off. The handcar men could not remain and hurried away as soon as they could get back their rope.

"I don't know what you're going to do with me,"

said Mark, ruefully. "I'd walk if I could but I can't and that's all there is to it."

"Does the ankle still hurt when you are resting?" asked the professor kindly.

"No, only when I try to stand on it."

"Then rest where you are and I will see what can be done toward getting a horse or some other animal to carry you."

Professor Strong started off toward the mountain road between La Guayra and Caracas, and the others gathered about Mark, bathing his ankle with water from a nearby pool and doing all they could otherwise to make him comfortable.

"It was a foolish thing to do, attempting to crawl around that cliff," observed Hockley, as he sat by watching proceedings, without offering any aid. "You've got us all into a muss. Goodness only knows when we'll get to Caracas now."

"You needn't wait for us if you don't wish to," retorted Frank, stung by the lank youth's harshness. "You can go ahead—I'm sure we shan't miss you."

"Don't you talk to me like that, Frank Newton. I won't stand it!" blurted out Hockley, his face reddening.

"I just will talk to you like that, Jake Hockley.

Mark didn't get his ankle sprained for fun, and you know it."

"Oh, let him alone, Frank," put in Mark. "It isn't worth quarreling about."

"I suppose you fellows will be getting into trouble right straight along," continued Hockley, who seemed to have one of his streaks of ill temper. "I shan't put up with it, I'll tell you that."

"You'll get into trouble in another minute, if you don't quit," cried Frank. "The best thing you can do is to go on to Caracas and leave us alone."

"That's all you fellows want—to get clear of me," growled the lank youth. "But you can't do it. My father's paying my way, and I'm going to do as I please, and I'm not going to allow Professor Strong to consult you and not me in everything either," he went on, bitterly.

As he finished speaking he started to move from one side of the little crowd to the other. He passed close to Mark and as he did so his foot hit the swollen ankle and made the youth on the ground cry out with pain.

"Oh, Hockley, what did you do that for?"

"I—er—I didn't mean to do it," answered the lank youth, surlily.

"You did mean to do it, you mean bully!" ejaculated Frank, who had seen the movement perfectly. And in a sudden rage he ran up and shoved Hockley backward into some brushwood. "If you try it again, I'll fight you, small as I am."

It took the lank youth a few seconds to recover and then his face was redder than ever. Without a word he darted for Frank and struck him heavily in the shoulder. Then he struck out again, but Frank dodged the blow. A moment more and the two had clinched and were rolling over and over on the ground.

CHAPTER X

ON MULE BACK INTO CARACAS

"A FIGHT! A fight!" came from Sam.

"Give it to him, Frank, don't let him get the best of you," put in Darry.

"Stop them," ordered Mark, trying to rise and then falling back with a groan of pain. "Stop them, I say. Glummy is too big for Frank."

"You let us alone," growled the bully. "This is our fight and we'll settle it between us. He struck me first."

While he was talking he was doing his best to get on top of Frank. But the latter, though small, proved that he was powerful and Hockley held him down with difficulty. The lank youth now hit out again and Frank was struck in the nose and the blood began to flow from that organ.

"Let me up!" came from the smaller youth. And then he too struck out, landing on Hockley's chin. Then he jerked the lank youth by the arm and

Hockley rolled over on the grass, and in a moment Frank was on top.

"Get off!" howled the bully, in a terrible rage over being thus brought to earth. "Get off, or I'll hammer the life out of you!"

"You've got to spell able first," retorted Frank and struck him in the cheek. "There's one for stepping on Mark's ankle and there's another to teach you manners." He struck out heavily. Then Hockley pulled him over and they laid side by side panting and striking and each endeavoring to rise.

Suddenly Frank saw his chance and struck the bully directly in the mouth. The blow was delivered with all the force possible and it loosened one of Hockley's teeth and made it bleed.

"Hurrah! Good for Frank!" cried Sam. "That's the sort."

"Hi! hi! what does this mean, boys?" The call came from the brushwood close at hand. "Stop that fighting instantly!"

The voice was that of Professor Strong, and both Frank and Hockley lost no time in leaping to their feet. They stepped apart and it must be confessed that Frank looked at the instructor rather shamefacedly. Hockley was defiant.

"What have you boys been fighting about?" demanded Professor Strong, as he came up and gazed at one and the other sternly."

"Newton started it," answered Hockley. "He tackled me without any reason for it."

"That isn't true," cried Frank. "He kicked Mark's sore ankle and that made me mad, and I told him what a brute he was, and shoved him back out of the way. Then he struck me in the shoulder."

"It isn't so, he hit me first," said Hockley, surlily.

"What Frank says is true," put in Darry. "He did kick Mark's lame ankle, and that was a shame."

"How about this?" questioned the professor, of Mark.

"He struck my ankle when he was walking past, sir. He said it was an accident, but——"

"It wasn't," broke in Frank. "I saw him do it on purpose."

"Hockley's been aching for a quarrel ever since he started," came from Sam.

"The whole crowd is down on me," growled the lank youth. "They want to run things to suit themselves and leave me out in the cold. My father pays my way and I don't see why I should play second fiddle to anybody."

"You will not be asked to play second fiddle, as you term it, Hockley," said the professor. "But at the same time I will allow no fighting. We are here to see the sights, and I expect you all to behave like young gentlemen. If you did not kick Mark in the ankle on purpose you should at least have been more careful of your steps, for a sprained ankle is nothing to fool with. I see your mouth is bleeding. You had better bathe it in yonder pool. And Newton, you go to the next pool and bathe your nose, and remember, this is the first and last fighting to be done on this trip."

Glad to get off thus easily the two boys walked away as directed and each did what he could to stop the flow of blood. Sam and Darry wanted to go after Frank but the professor stopped them.

"I want you two to help me with Mark," said Professor Strong. "I have found a native with several mules. He was carrying cane cuttings to Caracas, but I have hired him to drop his loads for the present and carry us instead. If you will join hands and catch Mark under the knees I will take him under the arms, and we can carry him to the road."

They soon had the crippled youth up and the pro-

fessor pointed out the direction in which the road over the mountain lay. The path to the point was thickly overgrown with brush and they had literally to force their way along. It was rough and more than once Mark felt like crying out but showed his grit by shutting his teeth and keeping silent.

Frank soon followed the three and Hockley did the same. The bully presently ranged up beside the smaller youth.

"Just you wait, I'll get square yet," he said, in a low tone.

"I'm not afraid of you," retorted Frank, who was satisfied that he had fully "kept up his end of the log," as the saying is.

"The next time we come to blows I'll not be so easy on you," went on Hockley. He was very angry to think that the smaller boy had not been afraid of him.

"Perhaps I won't be so easy either, Hockley," was Frank's answer, and then he ran on, to aid the others in getting Mark to the mule path.

Down on the path they found the native, a little, dried-up old Venezuelan, who had seven mules in his charge. The patient little beasts were scarcely

higher than Darry's shoulder. Four had been unloaded but the others stood in the road with loads of sugarcane cuttings so large that only their eyes and noses could be seen.

"Gracious what loads!" murmured Darry, as he gazed at the mules.

"These mules will carry about all you can put on them," said the professor, with a smile. "I have seen one mule carrying three men, and trotting along at that."

The mules to be used by our friends were soon ready, and then Mark was placed on the back of the one the native said was the best. Presently all were "aboard," as Darry expressed it, and the native led the procession in the direction of Caracas.

They could already see the outskirts of the city, which is located on the southern slope of the La Silla Mountain. To every side were mountain peaks, with here and there a small valley with streams of water of more or less importance. On the sides of the mule path were plantains and palms, and further out the sugar and coffee plantations, with their queer little huts and houses of pink, blue, and white.

"How large a place is Caracas?" questioned Sam, as they moved along as rapidly as Mark's condition permitted.

"There has been no accurate census taken for years, but the population is probably 75,000 souls. You see the laboring classes—called peons here—object to being enumerated for fear it may mean military service, and so they hide when the census man comes around. The whole valley in which the city lies numbers probably 150,000 souls."

"The houses look a good deal alike to me," observed Sam, as they made their way down one of the highways leading directly to the Plaza Bolivar, a park in the center of Caracas. "They all have mud and plaster walls, red-tiled roofs, windows with bars over them and no chimneys."

"Yes, I noticed the absence of chimneys," put in Frank, whose nose had now stopped bleeding. "Wonder what they do when they want fire in a house?"

"They never want fire," answered Professor Strong. "It is too warm for a fire. That is why they don't have glass to the windows."

"But they must cook."

"They do, but they use charcoal and burn it in a little contrivance something like a tinsmith's stove. You'll see plenty of them before you leave for home."

"They seem to paint their houses all colors," muttered Hockley, who now that Frank had spoken felt he too must say something. "There is a blue and a white, and there is a red, and here is a brown, and over yonder an orange."

"Yes they use any color they please," answered the professor. "It is sometimes the only way of telling one's house from that of a neighbor. They may look ugly to you from the outside, but you'll find many of them quite handsome and very comfortable within."

They had now entered the city proper and the sights and sounds around them interested the boys so much that they forgot to talk. Natives were hurrying by with huge bundles on their heads or balanced over their shoulders, little children with hardly any clothes were playing in the roadway, and the street was almost filled with pedlers and others on mule back. At one spot they encountered a native driving several cows.

"He's delivering his milk," said the professor. "He finds out how much a customer wants and then milks one of his cows to that extent."

"Then the milk ought to be fresh and rich," said Mark, who had found the ride surprisingly comfortable despite the awkward appearance of his steed.

"It is fresh enough, but not particularly rich, for the cows roam where they please and rarely get enough to eat."

"I should think a fellow would get all mixed up in a city where the houses are so much alike," said Sam.

"You won't get mixed after you get the run of the place, Winthrop. Remember that all the streets start from the cathedral at the Plaza Bolivar. The four streets there are called Avenue North, East, South, and West, and then follow Second Street North, Second Street East, and so on."

A few minutes more of riding brought them to the hotel at which they were to remain during their stop in Caracas. The professor went inside and announced their arrival and then the boys and he assisted Mark to alight. They passed through a large

iron gateway into a beautiful square filled with flowers, where a fountain was playing. Then a servant came to lead them to their rooms, which were all on the ground floor, and in a few minutes more they could truly say they were at home in Caracas.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROFESSOR MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

"How does the ankle feel?" asked Frank, on the morning following the arrival at the hotel.

"Somewhat sore, but I can stand on it," answered Mark. "I guess it will be all right again in a day or two;" and it was, although Mark was careful of the member for some time longer.

Under the guidance of the professor the boys made several tours of the city. They first visited the Capitol building, but a short distance from their hotel. The Capitol is but one story high, but it occupies an entire square, and is by far the finest building in Venezuela. In the center is a large court, where a fountain plays constantly and where grow the most beautiful of tropical flowers. Here are a number of rich marble statues.

Opening up from the court are the various official offices—the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, Interior and War Departments, Supreme Court, and others. At one end is a large hall, two hundred feet

long, with inlaid flooring, where public receptions are held. Here can also be found the portraits of various notables of Venezuelan history.

"This is Simon Bolivar, the Washington of South America," said the professor, as they stopped in front of a massive portrait at the end of the gallery. "He was born in this city in 1783, of wealthy parents of rank, and was sent to Spain to be educated. He became a lawyer and traveled extensively. While visiting the United States he became infused with the spirit of liberty, and returning home joined the patriots who were trying to throw off the yoke of Spain. He fought in a number of battles and then went to England to ask for aid from that country. But England would grant him nothing, and to escape the wrath of Spain he had to flee to Curaçao. But he was not disheartened, and soon after returned to South America. He began to raise troops of volunteers, and fought many more battles, in nearly all of which he was victorious. At last in 1813, he entered Caracas as a conqueror, was hailed as a liberator, and made absolute dictator in civil and military affairs. More battles followed, and Bolivar had to flee again, this time to Hayti. But he was undaunted, and coming back whipped the Spaniards once more

and helped to unite New Granada and Venezuela into the Republic of Colombia. After that he went to Peru and aided the Peruvians in establishing their freedom and a part of the country was named Bolivia in his honor. He died in 1842."

"Certainly a great man," said Darry. "What a lot of excitement he must have passed through!"

"He certainly did. At first he was but little appreciated, but as time goes by the people realize what a truly great man he was."

"There is a statue of him in Central Park, New York," put in Frank. "I have seen it a number of times, and so has Mark."

"You will find statues of Bolivar all over South America and also in Central America and Mexico. When the folks here realized what he had done for them, they went wild, and his ashes were brought here with great pomp and ceremony. He is undoubtedly the foremost figure in South American history for three hundred years."

Professor Strong had received a pass to the Senate Chamber, and they took a brief look at this somewhat bare apartment, with its stiff chairs, and its absence of regular desks.

"Does the President get much?" asked Hockley,

as they came to a halt out in the court where the fountain was playing.

"I believe his salary is $12,000 a year. Besides this he gets his house and servants free, also his livery, the same as our own President. But you must remember that the President here is a good deal of a dictator and can use the money of the government pretty much as he pleases. Sometimes a president draws money to suit himself, and then comes a revolution. This is not alone true of Venezuela, but it is true of many other South American republics"

Before leaving the Capitol building they looked in at the Treasury Department, and Frank asked about the money of the country.

"I've got some of their silver, but I must say I can't tell what it is," he said.

"Well, this is a bolivar," said the professor, taking a silver piece somewhat smaller than our quarter from his pocket. "This bolivar is worth twenty cents. The next smaller coin is a real, worth ten cents. Then comes a medio, five cents, a quartillo, two-and-a-half cents, and a centavo, which explains itself."

"But isn't there anything larger than a bolivar?" asked Darry.

"Yes, there are two and two-and-a-half bolivars, and a peso fuerte, which is worth one dollar. After that come the gold coins, worth four dollars and twenty dollars. I will show you all of them when we get back to the hotel."

Leaving the Capitol, they crossed the square to a beautiful building of white marble. This is the Central University, the leading institution of learning of the Republic.

"This is not a large college as such institutions are counted in our country," said the professor. "There are, I was told, about thirty professors and the students number about 400. But the course of study is very thorough, and embraces literature, art, law, medicine, science, engineering and theology. Here is also located the National Library of forty-five thousand volumes, many of which are rare and valuable. We will walk through, for I am inclined to think there is a professor here with whom I am well acquainted."

They walked through the library building first, with its long shelves of books and its cabinets of rare folios, and then into the college proper. Here the professor hailed a passing student and asked concerning his friend.

"*Si, señor,* he is here," said the student, in Spanish. "He teaches our class in engineering. Would you like to see him?"

"I would indeed," answered Professor Strong. "He and I were college students together."

"Then follow me to the class room. He is at his desk. The session has not yet begun."

Passing through a long and high corridor, they came to one of the class-rooms and entered. At a tall desk at one end sat a man of forty-five, working out a problem on a sheet of paper. He was evidently a Spaniard but one who had seen a great deal of the world.

"How are you, Morano," said the professor, stepping up and touching him on the arm.

The professor in engineering started up and stared for a moment. Then his face broke out into a warm smile, and he caught Professor Strong in both arms after the fashion of many foreigners.

"Strong, my own very dear friend, Amos Strong!" he cried, in a rich Spanish accent. "Where in the world have you come from, and when did you arrive? It is wonderful! I am so glad! You are yourself, but you look older. And these boys? Some of your sons perhaps?" And he took the pro-

fessor's hands and shook them over and over again.

"I am glad to see you, Morano," was the professor's equally warm reply. "It is fully fifteen years since we parted, in Paris, after a tour of the Old World. I tried to see you when I was here before, but you were down in Peru, helping to build a railroad bridge."

"Yes, that is so, I remember now. I could not stand it to teach—it is so hard, so steady, so confining. Outside it is different. One gets the air, one can walk about, and one is more happy. Then these are your sons? What are their names?"

"No, they are not my sons. I am not married."

"Indeed! A happy bachelor. So am I. Then they are——?"

"They are my pupils. I have brought them to South America to show them something of the country." The professor brought each one forward and mentioned his name. "Boys, this is Professor Enrique Morano, a very dear friend of mine, who once attended Yale with me, and who afterward made a tour of Europe with me and several other students."

"I am charmed to meet so many from the dear

United States," said Professor Morano, as he shook hands all around. "It is a great country and I am sorry I could not remain in it longer. But my respected father—peace to his ashes!—wished me to return."

"Then your father is dead?" asked Professor Strong.

"Yes, he died but four months ago. He took a trip to Nicaragua, and the journey was too hard for him. He left me utterly alone. But I should not bother you with my family afflictions. You are of course stopping in Caracas."

"Yes," and Professor Strong mentioned the hotel.

"You must come to my home—it is just outside of the city, on the road to Valencia. I am alone there with the servants and I will be pleased to have company, and doubly pleased that it is you. You must make the home your own."

"We shall be pleased to call," said Professor Strong.

"Why cannot you go there this evening, after the session is over here?" urged Enrique Morano. "We must talk of old times, must we not? Your pupils can inspect the coffee plantation which my late father purchased just before he died. It is now mine,

but I must confess I know not what to do with it. I am no planter. I am but a civil engineer and—a hunter, like yourself," and the Spanish teacher laughed.

"We will go, and gladly," answered Amos Strong. "I wish the boys to examine a coffee plantation thoroughly."

"Will you be at the hotel at five o'clock? If so I will send my carriage for you."

So it was arranged, and in a moment more they left the class room, for while the conversation was going on the place had been filling with pupils, many of whom stared curiously at the strangers.

"A nice man," was Darry's comment when they were outside. He turned to the professor: "I don't wonder you took to him for a college friend."

"There is no better man than Henry Morano," was Amos Strong's reply. "I liked him from the first. He is a splendid scholar and an equally good hunter in the bargain. You can rest assured of a good time when you are in his company. We are very fortunate in meeting him."

CHAPTER XII

MARKEL AGAIN TO THE FRONT

"We will now go over to the City Hall," said Professor Strong, when they found themselves in the Plaza once more. "It is a spot full of interest, especially for all people of South America, for it was to them the Cradle of Liberty, the same as our Independence Hall at Philadelphia."

The building was but a step away, an ancient looking affair, with thick adobe walls and small slits of windows. The rooms are, many of them, small and uncomfortable, and the decorations tawdry to a degree.

"Independence was proclaimed here on July 5th, 1811," said Professor Strong, as they entered a council chamber located at one corner. "Here the very best representatives of the country assembled to throw off the yoke of Spain. Yonder is a faded picture depicting the event, and the important looking document on the wall opposite is the declaration it-

self. The paper was drawn up by Francisco Miranda, an able leader, especially civilly, although he was not so successful in the battle field as Simon Bolivar. Miranda was a great friend to La Fayette, and when La Fayette sailed to America Miranda went with him and served all through the Revolutionary War under Washington. This planted in his breast the same seed of liberty that was planted in the breast of Bolivar."

"That shows how far-reaching was the influence of our Revolution," remarked Sam. "We threw that tea overboard to some purpose, didn't we?"

"What is this thing?" asked Hockley, pointing to a faded banner hanging close at hand.

"That is a relic of Pizarro at the time he went to conquer Peru. He carried that banner all through his trail of fire and blood, doing it in the name of the church, but with a cruelty only equaled by the worst of savages. This is not the whole of the banner. It was cut in half and the other portion is in the National Museum at Bogota."

An hour was spent at the City Hall viewing other objects of interest, including the great city marriage register and the various portraits on the walls. Then they walked past the Municipal Theater and on to the

new market place, a neat building with cement floor, where the stalls were divided by lattice-work.

"There is another market place," said Professor Strong, "and at present business is divided between the two. At the other place there are no stalls, but the traders simply lay their stuff in a heap on the ground and sit beside it."

"How nice the vegetables and fruits look!" exclaimed Frank. "I never saw anything fresher."

"They have fresh vegetables the year around here, for they will grow at any time the seed is put in the ground. They are all picked at night or early in the morning and brought to the market on mule or donkey back. You can see for yourself that they have all the ordinary vegetables with which we are acquainted. They also have others, like for instance that yucca, and the arrowroot, bread-fruit, and many kinds of bananas and delicious pineapples."

"There is an alligator pear," said Mark. "I've seen them on some high-toned fruit stands in New York."

"The native name is aguacate. Did you notice the size of the muskmelons? They are just as sweet as they look, and those big, long whitish peas will melt like butter in your mouth."

It was now growing hot, and they were glad enough to leave the market place and go back to the hotel. As they rambled around they had met many natives going to or coming from business, some faultlessly dressed in white duck suits and broad Panama hats. Many of the hats were exceedingly fine in texture.

"I once owned one that I used at times for six years," said the professor, speaking of the hats. "I could jam it in anywhere and it always came forth looking as good as ever. But it cost me thirty-five dollars."

"Phew! that's rather steep," cried Darry. "But I've heard of such big prices before."

The boys had found the service at the hotel of the best. The servants were numerous and did everything with a gravity which at times was to them almost comical. They were very attentive to all details, and the guests were not permitted to do a single thing for themselves.

"My gracious, I think they would eat for me if I asked them," said Darry. "Never saw such waiters in my life. That fellow pushed my chair around for me, held the glass of water, handed the bill of fare and didn't give me a chance to lay it down, and held

the butter pat while I buttered my bread. It goes ahead of anything I ever experienced before."

"Reckon they're laying back for tips," growled Hockley. "I've heard that all these foreign fellows think they can sponge on the Yankees every time."

"You won't have to tip them," answered Professor Strong, dryly. "I will attend to that when I settle our bills."

"Oh, I don't mind tipping them," answered the lank youth, hastily. "I always give the waiters something at home."

After lunch the whole party took it easy in the court by the fountain, where there were numerous easy chairs and hammocks. Mark and Frank fell asleep, and soon after Darry and Sam followed. But Hockley was restless and at last got up to walk around.

He had just entered the office of the hotel when the clerk came toward him holding up an envelope.

"A message for Mistair Jacob Hockley," he said.

"That's my name," returned Hockley, and took the message wondering whom it was from and what it contained.

It was a cablegram, sent from Curaçao, and was signed "Daniel Markel." It read as follows:

"Unexpectedly delayed. Coming to-morrow. Meet me at Hotel Ziroda."

"So he was delayed and is coming to-morrow," muttered Hockley, as he gazed at the cablegram. "Hullo, it's dated yesterday. In that case he'll be at the Hotel Ziroda to-day. I'd like to know what he has to say for himself."

Stuffing the message in his pocket he went up to the clerk and asked that individual where the Hotel Ziroda was located. Receiving the information he started to go back to where he had left the professor, then suddenly changed his mind.

"He may refuse me if I ask him about going," he mused. "I'd better go and say nothing." And off he started, bent on seeing Dan Markel and learning what the man from Baltimore had to say for himself.

The Hotel Ziroda was an ancient hostelry, square in shape, with a small arched doorway leading to the inevitable court inside. It had seen better days and was far from prosperous. A greasy landlord sat in a wicker chair, half asleep, and with a lighted cigar hanging from his teeth.

"Hullo, are you the proprietor?" asked Hockley, touching him on the arm.

"What do you want?" asked the man, in Spanish, as he tried to rouse up.

"I say, are you the proprietor?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Is there a man here by the name of Markel—Daniel Markel? He came from Willemstad yesterday?"

"*Si, señor.* Markel, *señor,* he ees here. Come, I show you."

With a profound sigh the hotel man arose and conducted Hockley through the dirty court to a room in one corner of the building. He knocked and a voice inside called out: "Who's there?"

"It's me," answered Hockley, without regard to grammar.

"Me, who?"

"Hockley. I just got your cablegram."

"Oh!" Markel leaped from the bed upon which he had been lying and opened the door. "Glad to see you. Come in," and Hockley went in, and the hotel proprietor left the pair to themselves.

The room was large and scantily furnished, with a bed, washstand, table and one chair. On the table stood Markel's valise, a bottle of liquor and a glass,

and a box of cigars. The room was half full of smoke and smelt far from pleasant.

"Never so sorry in all my life," said the man from Baltimore, as he drew up the chair for Hockley to sit down while he sank on the edge of the bed. "I suppose you thought I had given you the go by." He glanced keenly at the lank youth to see the effect of his words.

"I—I didn't know what to think," stammered Hockley.

"When I found the steamer gone I was fairly wild, Hockley, indeed I was. I said to myself, 'He'll think I'm a thief sure, for I've a cool half hundred of his money.' I wanted to send you word, but I was so upset I forgot about the cable until afterwards. Here, have a drink and I'll tell you all about it."

He handed Hockley the bottle and the glass, and the youth had not the courage to resist. He took a small drink of the fiery stuff, which fairly burnt his throat as he swallowed it.

"Well, how did it happen?" he questioned.

"It was a funny thing. I went ashore to transact a little business with an old Dutch importer who used to do business with a firm that can oysters in Balti-

more. Well, while I was in the place two natives came in and another native followed. First thing I knew one of the first natives had picked the other's pocket. The man who was robbed accused the third native of the crime. There was a big row and they were going to carry off the innocent man to jail when I stepped up and told the old Dutchman how it was and what I had seen. A policeman was called, and as a consequence I had to go to the station house and remain there all night as a witness to the affair. I tried my best to get away and to send you word, but I couldn't do a thing with those sleepy Dutch officials. They left me to my misery and there I had to remain until ten o'clock the next morning. Then the case came up and what do you think? Nobody made any charge and everybody was dismissed: Disgusted? Well, of course I was, but what could I do?"

"It was enough to make anybody mad," was Hockley's comment.

"I threatened to sue the city for false imprisonment, but they only laughed at me. So then I hunted up a vessel bound for La Guayra and finally sent the cablegram—and here I am. How have you been?"

"Oh, I'm well enough."

"Seen anything of the city?"

"Yes, the professor has piloted us to one place and another. But it's mighty slow looking at old buildings and documents and pictures. I didn't come for that. I came for a good time."

"Right you are, and a good time you shall have, so long as we are together. I promised to show you the ins and outs of Caracas and I'm going to do it," concluded Dan Markel as he slapped Hockley on the back. "We'll paint the town red, eh?"

CHAPTER XIII

A PLANTATION HOME IN VENEZUELA

"GUESS I've been asleep, and guess the others have been asleep, too."

It was Frank who uttered the words as he roused up and rubbed his eyes. Mark was still sleeping and Darry and Sam had just stirred like himself. The professor was dozing with a guide book resting on his lap. Everything around the hotel was quiet, only the dripping of the fountain breaking the stillness.

"It's a sleepy man's land during midday," remarked Darry, as he arose slowly to his feet. "The air takes all the ambition out of a fellow. I don't wonder that no business is transacted excepting during the early morning and late in the afternoon."

The boys walked around the hotel and then into the street beyond. A few natives were moving about, but that was all. The sun, striking the pavement, made the place like a furnace, and they were glad to retreat once more to the shelter of the court.

"Where is Hockley?" asked Professor Strong, as he, too, roused up.

"I don't know," answered Darry, and the others said the same.

"Perhaps he is taking a look around on his own account," suggested Mark. "He said something about wanting to see the lumber yards, so that he could write to his father and tell him how they handled lumber down here."

"They handle it here very much as they do everywhere else in South America," answered the professor. "Some is carried on wagons, but a great deal is transported on the backs of mules."

"How can a mule carry a long stick of timber?" asked Frank. "If he carried it sideways it would more than block the street."

"They use two or more mules and it is wonderful how they balance the loads. Then, too, the natives carry a great lot of things on their shoulders and heads."

"What are the real natives?" asked Darry. "I've seen all sorts of people here—white, black, red, and mixed."

"The real natives are the Indians, Crane," returned the professor, with a smile. "They lived

here long before the days of Columbus, just as they inhabited our own country. Next to the Indians come the Spaniards who were the first settlers. The Spaniards introduced the negroes, who came from Africa and from the West Indies as slaves. The intermixture of these races have produced the mestizoes, who are of Spanish and Indian blood, the mulattoes, of negro and creole blood, and the zambos, of negro and Indian blood. These people are also intermixed, so that it is sometimes impossible to tell what a person is."

"Like the man in New York who came up to be naturalized," said Mark. "His father was an Englishman and his mother a Frenchwoman. His grandfather had been born in Germany and his grandmother in Italy. He had emigrated to Canada and there married a Canadian Indian woman. Then he had moved down to New York, and his oldest daughter had married an Irishman. If they have any children it will be hard to tell what they will be." And there was a general laugh at this sally.

"They'll be Americans," said Frank. "Uncle Sam's flag is wide and broad enough to cover them all, if they care to come under the folds of Old Glory."

At last came the hour when Enrique Morano's carriage could be expected and soon a fine turnout hove into sight, drawn by a team of white horses.

"That's as fine a carriage as any in Central Park," said Frank.

"It is probably of United States manufacture," answered the professor. "We export a great number of vehicles to South America."

"Evidently they appreciate good horseflesh," put in Mark. "Here come a couple of horsemen now. The town is beginning to wake up."

The horsemen dashed by in a spirited manner, clad in white with broad sashes at their waists, and wearing sweeping hats which flapped gracefully in the warm wind. In the rear rode an attendant, carrying a small hamper filled with refreshments.

As Hockley was not at hand, the professor asked the driver of the carriage to wait a little, while he took a look around the square. But the youth was nowhere to be seen and Professor Strong came back looking somewhat worried.

"He knew when we were to leave," he said. "I can't understand this."

"Oh, Hockley takes his time about everything,"

put in Sam. "He said he was down here for pleasure, and that he was going to suit himself."

"He has no right to keep the whole party waiting," answered the professor briefly. He said no more, but his eyes showed that his mind was busy.

"Hockley will get a lecture when he shows up," whispered Frank to Darry.

"He'll get only what he deserves, Darry. Isn't that so, Beans?"

"To be sure," came from Sam. "He howled about us delaying him at the railroad cliff; now he's doing the same thing himself."

Quarter of an hour went by and the boys wondered if the professor would make them give up the trip if Hockley did not return. Then came a messenger with a note for Professor Strong. The note was from Hockley and ran as follows:

"DEAR PROFESSOR STRONG: Have just met some old friends of my father, and they wish me to spend the evening with them as they are bound for Philadelphia to-morrow. Please excuse me from going to that plantation with you. Will be at the hotel when you get back."

"Hockley has met some friends and wishes to stay with them a few hours," said the professor. "We will go without him."

"I'm just as well satisfied," murmured Mark, but in a low voice, so that Professor Strong did not hear him.

They were soon seated in the carriage, the negro driver touched up the pair, and away they rolled, down the smooth street, around a corner of the public square and on toward the road leading to Valencia, which is located on the lake of the same name, and on the line of a railroad between the two points.

"When I was here before, the railroad ran no further than Victory, a two days' drive in a carriage," said the professor, when Caracas was left behind and they found themselves climbing over the hills on a road lined with beautiful tropical trees. "Now one can go straight through to Valencia and also part of the way around the lake. There is also a railroad from Valencia to Puerto Cabello, on the seacoast, west of La Guayra, and a steamer runs every ten days between the two seaports."

"I don't see much but coffee plantations around here," observed Mark.

"Coffee and cocoa is the great industry in this valley, for Caracas affords an easy market for shipments. Caracas chocolate, made from the cocoa bean, is known everywhere, and so is Maracaibo coffee."

"Hockley was saying that Mocha coffee came from here," put in Frank. "But I said it came from Arabia."

"So it does come from Arabia. But there is a kind of coffee grown here which is a good deal like Mocha in flavor and is often sold as such."

"I'd like to know something about coffee raising." put in Darry. "We drink so much of the stuff that I think we ought to know about it."

"I will explain when we get to Professor Morano's plantation."

An hour's drive from Caracas brought them to the entrance of the plantation and they passed through a wide gateway along a broad and well kept path lined with giant palms. Between the palms were urns of flowers, all blooming in red, yellow and blue. Trailing vines were also in evidence, and they covered the stone wall which separated the plantation from the highway.

The plantation house proved to be an old and sub-

stantial affair, one story in height, and occupying the space of a small city block. The outside was decorated with stucco work painted in pale blue and yellow. There was the usual archway in front, over which was erected a lattice work covered with trailing plants.

The civil engineer, for such Enrique Morano really was, was already there to receive them, in spotless white, even to the tie with a diamond which he wore.

"Welcome, three times welcome to all of you!" he cried, gaily, as he ran forward and assisted Professor Strong to alight. "You have given me a great pleasure by coming, and while you stay you must make yourselves perfectly at home."

"Thank you, we will, Morano," answered the professor.

They were soon inside the building, which was built, like so many others, in the form of a hollow square. The patio was a garden of flowers, with a single giant palm in the center. There was a broad veranda running entirely around the house, with two steps at either side of the passage leading to the outside. The flooring of the veranda was of two kinds of wood, laid in fancy designs.

"Come into the parlor," said Enrique Morano, and led the way into an apartment facing the highway beyond. It was a room at least twenty feet square, with a polished floor partly covered with rugs. The furniture was of hardwoods, elaborately carved but without any fixed coverings.

"Not so very different from a summer parlor at home," whispered Frank, when they were left alone for a moment.

"They don't cover the furniture on account of the bugs and insects," said the professor.

Opening up from the parlor was a library and smoking room. Enrique Morano had furnished this to suit himself, and it was very much in the style of a rich college man at Princeton or Yale. There was a case of books and files of the latest papers and magazines, and also a case containing cigars, cigarettes, smoking tobacco and pipes.

"A regular den!" cried Professor Strong, his face brightening. "And just as you had it in the olden days."

"It reminds me of good old times," answered Enrique Morano. "Those college days! I shall never forget them, nor the many friends I made in the United States."

He asked them to sit down, while he offered the professor a cigar. The boys were glad enough to look over the files of native papers and Spanish magazines, although they could read but little. There were *El Diario de Caracas,* the leading daily of the capital, *El Pregonero,* another daily, and a magazine with some reproductions of pictures from American and foreign weeklies.

"What funny advertisements," said Mark, as he spelt one and another out. "Here is a store that has for sale American sewing machines of the latest fashions, and another that sells clothing that will make a man look like a President."

While Professor Strong and his old friend were smoking and conversing the boys were told to roam through the house at will, and this they did. Next to the library they found a dining hall, long and broad, with a table in the center which was so heavy none of the boys could budge it. Here the tableware was of solid silver and of the finest cut glass.

Passing from the dining hall, they entered a narrow corridor, with bed chambers on either side. Here the windows were covered with bamboo or venetian blinds. All of the beds stood in the center of the

apartments, never against a wall. There were handsome dressing cabinets, also of massive wood in fancy designs. Between the bedrooms was a large bathroom, where the bath was nothing less than a small swimming pool, the top being on a level with the floor.

"Hurrah! a fellow can take a regular swim here!" cried Frank. "No wonder these folks look so clean. I'd want to bathe in that all the time."

Beyond the bedrooms was the kitchen, in which the most of the food for the table was prepared. Attached to the kitchen was a small room of rough stone, in which were located half a dozen tiny charcoal stoves for cooking.

The servants attached to the place were as interesting as the house itself. A little negro boy went around with them. He had learned to say, "Yes, mistair," and "No, mistair," and he repeated these over and over again, each time bowing profoundly and rolling his eyes in a truly comical fashion. The boy's name was Bulo, and our friends took to him from the start.

"Pretty big house," said Mark, as they stopped near the kitchen, where a dozen girls were at work,

some preparing dinner and some shining tableware, all under the directions of a tall Spanish housekeeper.

"Yes, mistair," said Bulo, and bowed to the ground.

"How many servants?" questioned Darry.

"No, mistair," replied the little colored youth, and bowed again.

"I said, how many servants?" repeated Darry.

"Yes, mistair, no mistair," returned Bulo, and bowed half a dozen times, then as the boys laughed he laughed too, showing two rows of pure white ivories.

"You're all right, Bulo," said Mark, after the merriment was over. "Here's a souvenir for you," and he handed the colored boy a medio, which, as mentioned before, is worth five cents.

"Yes, mistair, yes, mistair," said Bulo, with glistening eyes. And as he stuffed the coin in his shirt, he bowed half a dozen times again, and then, considering himself dismissed ran off, singing at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XIV

A LOSS OF HONOR AND MONEY

We will now go back to Dan Markel and Hockley, and see how the lank youth fared at the hands of the man from Baltimore.

The proposition of Markel to "paint the town red," appealed to Hockley, but he looked glum when he heard the words.

"Yes, I'd like to go with you," he said. "But I can't."

"Can't? And why not, my dear boy?"

"I've got to stay around with the professor and the rest. We're to visit a coffee plantation this afternoon."

"Oh, that's dead slow."

"I know it is, and I don't want to go, but I don't see how I'm to get out of it."

Dan Markel lit a fresh cigar and handed the box to his visitor. "We must think of some scheme," he said, slowly. "Ah, I have it. Write a note say-

ing that you have met some old friends and won't be back."

"But he'll want to know about the friends to-morrow."

"Will he? Then state they are about to sail—anything to smooth it over. He can't expect you to tie fast to his coat-tails all the time, you know. You're too big for that."

"To be sure I'm too big," blustered Hockley, lighting one of the cigars and making an attempt to enjoy it. "Let me have some paper and I'll send the note."

Paper was produced and also a pencil, and soon the note was finished and given to one of the boys outside to deliver. Of course the message was a complete falsehood, yet it did not appear to trouble Hockley's conscience.

"Now what shall we do first?" asked the youth, after Markel had taken another drink from the bottle.

"When are the others going to start for that plantation?"

"They are starting about now," answered Hockley, after consulting his watch.

"What time have you?"

"Half-past five."

"Ain't you slow?"

"I don't think so. This watch is a first-class timepiece, and it ought to be, for it cost my dad a hundred and twenty-five dollars."

"Is that so?" Dan Markel's eyes glistened. "Mine is a poor thing alongside of that. It only cost twenty-five dollars." He arose and stretched himself. "Let us go and have something to eat first, and then I'll show you some sights worth seeing."

They entered the dining room, and Markel ordered an elaborate repast with wine. It was a long time before it was served and then it was not nearly as good as what Hockley had had at the other hotel.

"Guess they've been changing cooks here," observed Markel, when he saw that the youth did not relish the food. "Had splendid feed when I was here before. The very freshest of everything. I'll have to find another place by to-morrow."

"Come over to where we are," suggested Hockley.

"Thanks, perhaps I will."

It was dark by the time the repast was finished. Markel made a pretense of paying the bill but allowed his young friend to settle.

"Say, but you are pretty well fixed," he said, as he eyed Hockley's roll of bills. "I wish I could say as much for myself."

"I've only got about a hundred dollars here," answered the lank youth, carelessly. "But I can get the other when I want it."

"Did you have to put it in the professor's care?"

"No, he wanted it, but I told him I could take care of it. I left it in my valise."

"But somebody may go through your valise."

"I don't think so. Besides, the money is under a false bottom in the valise. You can't open it unless you touch a spring on the side."

"I see. That's a handy thing. Well, let us be going, or it will be time to return before we've seen anything at all."

"I don't care when I get back, Markel. I can tell the professor that my friends kept me all night."

"Of course you can. Say, would you like to see a real out-and-out cock fight? There is going to be one to-night, in the rear of the Horn of Gold saloon. The hotel keeper was telling me about it. He put up five bolivars on one of the birds. All the best sports in town will be there."

"All right, let's go—unless there's a bull fight on somewhere," answered Hockley.

"No bull fight to-night, Hockley. But that cock fight will be a cooler, I can assure you. One of the birds belongs to a Spanish millionaire, and the other to one of the native generals in the army. We will strike some high-toned people at the fight sure."

The prospect of going to a place where he would meet the "dead game" sports of Caracas pleased Hockley, and he already fancied how he would "blow" about the affair when he got back among his old cronies at home. "I'll meet the bon-tons," he said to himself. "It's a good deal better than going to see a dried-up old coffee plantation."

They were soon on the way, down one broad street and then into a side road which was little better than an alleyway. At the end of the road stood a ramshackle building dimly lit. Over the door hung a gilded horn of plenty, giving to the resort its name, Horn of Gold.

Entering the drinking room they found a crowd of thirty or forty assembled, of various nationalities, some black and some white, with two or three of Indian blood. At the rear a negro was strumming a

guitar and another was singing at the top of his lungs, in order to make himself heard. But the clanking of glasses and the loud talking all but drowned out the music, if such it can be called.

To a youth of good habits the surroundings would have been disgusting to the last degree. But Hockley took them in as "part of the game," and said nothing. Yet the thick tobacco smoke made him dizzy, and he dropped his own cigar when Markel was not looking.

Hockley was at a disadvantage, since he could not speak a word of the language. He listened attentively for some English, but none was spoken.

"Sit down here while I learn the particulars of this fight," said the man from Baltimore, and motioned him to a seat in a corner, near the guitar player. Then Markel went off, not to re-appear for ten minutes.

"It's all right—I've got two tickets, but I had to pay six bolivars for them," said the man, on returning. "Come this way."

They passed through a dark passageway and into a small enclosure without a roof. There were several rows of benches around a boarded-up ring in the

center. Half a dozen smoky lamps lit up this fighting pit, as it was termed.

"One bird is called the King and the other Favorita," said Markel. "The odds are on the King. I'm going to lay a few bolivars on him."

"Do the same for me," said Hockley and passed over some silver coins. He was so dizzy from smoking and drinking that he could scarcely remember what the coins were worth.

Markel made the bets, and soon the place began to fill with the sports who had come to see the fight. None of those who came in were the least bit "high-toned" in appearance, much to Hockley's chagrin, nor did he behold a single military uniform, although he had expected to see a number.

"Must be an off night," said Markel. "Here, have another cigar. I see you have finished the other."

He insisted upon Hockley smoking, and by the time the cocks were brought in to fight the youth was so dizzy he could scarcely see. The place was filled with smoke, the crowd talked, laughed, cheered and hissed, and oaths were by no means lacking. In the midst of it all the birds fought until one was so

badly wounded that it died shortly afterwards and the other was almost equally mutilated. And yet some people call such cruelty sport! It is not sport at all, simply an exhibition of brutality, the same as bull baiting and prize fighting.

"What did you say? Is it over?" asked Hockley, trying to rouse himself from a sudden sickening stupor into which he had fallen.

"Yes, it's over and our bird wasn't in it," replied Markel. "What did you think of it?"

"I couldn't see much, on account of the poor lights and the tobacco smoke."

"Yes, the light was beastly. But it was a gamey fight, I can tell you that. Come on."

"I didn't see many of the fashionables," was Hockley's comment.

"No. I was told there is a ball on somewhere to-night and they must have gone there. Let us go into the saloon and have a drink."

There was a crowd in the dark passageway and Hockley found himself pushed first to one side and then another. Markel was beside him, and the hands of the man from Baltimore went into first one pocket of the youth's clothes and then another.

As soon as they had reached the drinking place

Dan Markel insisted upon treating his companion liberally. Then he settled the score and went out to order a carriage to take them to the hotel.

In such a condition that he could scarcely walk, poor, deluded Hockley was assisted to the turnout and Markel climbed in beside him. It was now after midnight.

"Say!" cried Hockley, suddenly. "My watch is gone!"

"Your watch?" ejaculated the man from Baltimore, in well assumed surprise. "Are you certain?"

"Course I'm certain—it's gone—best gold watch," muttered Hockley, feeling into his various pockets with difficulty.

"Perhaps you dropped it in the carriage," went on Markel, pretending to make a search. "It don't seem to be here."

"Some of those rascals at the cock fight robbed me," groaned Hockley. He dove into his vest pockets. "Say! my money's gone too!"

"You don't say!" cried Markel. "That is bad and no mistake. You must have run afoul of a regular thief. Is there anybody you suspect?"

"Can't say as there is. There was a nigger got pretty close to me just after the fight ended."

"Then he must be the man. Shall we go back?"

"If he robbed me it ain't likely he's around now." groaned Hockley. He gave a deep yawn. "Hang the luck anyway! Say, I feel awfully tired, I do."

His eyes closed and although he tried to keep awake in a few minutes he was fast asleep. Dan Markel eyed him curiously.

"He was easier game than I thought of striking," said the man from Baltimore to himself. "A gold watch and about a hundred dollars in cash. That's not so bad. Wonder what I had best do with him?"

The carriage rolled on, and as it covered the distance to the Hotel Ziroda, Dan Markel revolved the situation in his mind. As the turnout came to a stop a peculiar light flashed in the rascal's dark eyes.

"Might as well go the whole thing while I am at it," he said to himself. "I won't be able to hoodwink that professor as I have this young fellow. If I can get the rest of the money I can clear out, and they'll never be able to find me."

He and the carriage driver assisted Hockley to the ground, and then one of the hotel helpers came forward and helped Markel get the youth to the room which the man from Baltimore occupied. No questions were asked, for such occurrences were not

uncommon among those who patronized the Hotel Ziroda.

"He will stay with me to-night," said Markel. "I will foot the bill whatever it is."

Laying Hockley on the bed, Markel allowed him to sleep there, while he himself took a nap in a chair by the window. The youth lay in a stupor, snoring loudly, and was still snoring when Markel roused up at six o'clock.

"My friend wishes you to send around to his hotel for his traveling bag," said the man from Baltimore to the clerk in the office. "Here is his card. If Professor Strong is there, tell him that Mr. Hockley wishes to get a souvenir from the bag to give to his friend who is to sail to-day."

A messenger was sent off, and while he was gone Dan Markel walked around anxiously. He was half afraid Professor Strong would accompany the messenger on the return, in which case it would perhaps be best for him to leave by a back way and without notice to anybody.

The messenger was gone fully half an hour, but when he returned he was alone, much to Markel's relief. He had Hockley's valise and turned it over to the man from Baltimore without question.

When Markel re-entered the bed chamber the poor fellow was stirring uneasily. But he did not awaken and the rascal easily obtained from his pocket the key to the traveling bag. Then the bag was opened and Markel began a search for the hidden spring.

At last it was found, and the false bottom flew up, revealing a pocket containing a flat pocketbook. Hastily opening the wallet Markel saw that it was filled with bank bills and gold to the amount of several hundred dollars.

"I've got it!" he muttered, his eyes glistening. He closed the bag, locked it, and placed the wallet in his own clothing. For a moment he hesitated, then kicked the bag under the bed and hurried to the door. As he passed out Hockley gave a long-drawn sigh, turned over and went to sleep again.

Once in the corridor, Dan Markel paused and looked around. Nobody was in sight, and watching his chance, he made his way to a side entrance of the hotel and from there into the street. Then he hurried on, down the square, and out of sight.

"I've got it," he muttered.

CHAPTER XV

SOMETHING ABOUT COFFEE GROWING

"I FEEL like a new boy," remarked Mark, on the morning following the arrival at Enrique Morano's plantation. "I slept like a top last night."

"So did I," answered Frank. "That bed just suited me. Wonder if anybody is stirring yet?"

"They must be. I just heard Bulo singing. What a sweet voice that darkey has."

The boys were soon dressed and out in the court-yard, where the professor and the others presently joined them.

"We will have a regular American breakfast," said Enrique Morano. "Usually my countrymen have nothing but a cup of coffee and a roll on rising, but I dropped that habit when I stopped in the United States."

"I noticed the coffee and rolls at the hotel," said Darry. "They are not very substantial."

Breakfast was soon served, of cantelopes, tapioca, fish, rice cakes, rolls, and coffee and to it all did full

justice. The cantelopes were particularly fine and fairly melted in the boys' mouths.

"I must go to the University in an hour," said Señor Morano. "But I have arranged for Greva, my head steward, to take you all over the place and explain whatever you desire to know. Greva speaks very good English. I will be with you again at four this afternoon, and then, if you wish, I will take you off on a horseback ride into the country."

"We were thinking of getting back to Caracas this afternoon," said Professor Strong.

"No, no, you must not think of it, my dear Strong!" cried the civil engineer. "I will not listen. You must remain to-night at least. I have so much I wish to talk about to you."

"Oh, let us stay!" whispered Darry. "I'm just aching for a good horseback ride."

"Yes, let us stay!" chimed in the others, and the professor could not resist the appeal.

"But what of Hockley?" he said. "He will be wondering what became of us."

"Send him a letter to come out," suggested Mark. And this was done, the letter being carried to the city by Enrique Morano himself.

Immediately after Enrique Morano had departed,

the steward, Juan Greva, who had been already introduced, came forward, and conducted them from the house to the nursery attached to the place.

"This is where we first grow our coffee plants," he said, in a strong Spanish accent. "We sow the seeds in the ground and let the plant come up until it is about a foot high before we transplant it to the field."

"And how long does it take for them to grow as high as that?" asked Sam.

"About a year and a half. Then they are set out in the field, which is first ploughed thoroughly and planted with banana trees to shade the plants. Later on we plant bucuara trees instead of the bananas, as they are more hardy. If the coffee plants were not shaded like that they might dry up."

"Do they bear at once?" questioned Darry.

"Oh, no, far from it. They sometimes bear a little the fourth or fifth year, but give nothing like a regular crop until the seventh or eighth year."

"Gracious, what a time to wait!" murmured Frank.

"That is true, Newton," said the professor. "But after a plantation is once started it will last fifty years or more."

"One plantation here has lasted seventy-five years," said Juan Greva. "It yields 1,200 quintals of coffee a season, and the plantation is worth $60,000 of United States money."

"How much is a quintal?" came from Frank.

"One hundred and twenty-five pounds," answered the professor. "1,200 quintals would be how much, Newton?"

"150,000 pounds, sir," answered Frank, after a short mental calculation.

"Correct. Now, Robertson, at $15 per hundred pounds, what is such a crop worth?"

"The crop is worth $22,500," answered Mark, after another pause.

"Gracious, there must be money in raising coffee!" exclaimed Sam.

"Do they get fifteen cents a pound for this?" questioned Darry.

"The market price at present is about sixteen cents," answered Juan Greva. "It runs from ten cents to twenty-two cents."

"You must remember, boys, that what is received for the coffee is not pure gain. The plants have to be cared for constantly and there is much to do be-

fore the bean is ready for the market. All such labor has to be paid for."

From the nursery they walked to the coffee grove itself, a long and broad field, laid out into squares, with ditches of water flowing between. The plants were set out in rows, with many banana and bucuara trees between.

"The coffee plants blossom in September," said the steward, as they walked through the field. "The blossoms are something like orange blossoms, which your ladies love to use at weddings. Then comes the berry, which is something like a red cherry and is picked in April and May. The picking is a great time and men, women and children take part, each with a basket on his or her back. A good picker can pick berries enough in one day to make forty to fifty pounds of coffee."

Going into one of the storehouses, the steward brought out some of the half-dried berries and broke them open. Inside rested the seed, two coffee beans with the flat sides together and covered with a sticky pulp.

"Don't look much like the beans we get," said Frank.

"These beans have to be dried and the pulp must be taken off," said the professor.

"How do they get the pulp off?" asked Mark.

"The berry is first crushed and then the mass is put through a machine which separates the pulp from the seeds. Then the seeds, or beans, are washed twice and dried, and come out as white as anyone would wish."

"But our coffee isn't white?" said Frank. "It's green—that is, before it is roasted."

"The whiteness is all on the skin of the bean, which must be taken off before the coffee is ready for market. Did you notice that large stone flooring on the other side of this field? That is the drying floor." The professor turned to the steward. "How long do you dry your coffee here?"

"From six weeks to two months," answered Juan Greva. "The weather makes the time short or long. Each day the coffee is spread out with rakes and at night it is gathered in heaps and covered with heavy cloth."

"What a lot of work for a cup of coffee!" murmured Mark.

"The work does not stop there," said the steward with a smile. "When the coffee is dry it goes into

a machine which takes off the shell and then into another machine which blows it perfectly clean. After that it goes to the sorting room, where the girls separate the good beans from the bad and grade the good into five grades."

"And then what?" came from Sam.

"Then the coffee is placed in bags and sewed up —that is, the coffee which goes to the United States and England. When you get it, it is roasted and ground."

"And then we take it and boil it, and strain it, and put milk and sugar to it, and drink it down, and that's the end of it," broke in Darry. "What a lot to do just for one cup of coffee! I never dreamed of such work before."

"There is something else that is done with coffee, though not here," said Professor Strong. "In Brazil they often paint coffee black for the South African market, and in other places coffee is polished so that it shines like silver. Every country has its peculiar taste and the dealer must do his best to suit that taste or lose the trade."

After walking through the coffee grove, they turned back to the warehouses, and Juan Greva explained the various tools at hand for caring for the

plants. "The coffee bush is a hardy one, but must be carefully watched if we wish to get the best results," he said. "It must have enough water but not too much, and we must be careful of grubs and worms."

It was now growing warm, and the whole party was glad enough to retire to the shelter of a palm grove behind the warehouses. On two sides of the grove were long rows of fruit trees with bushes of various kinds of berries growing between. They sat down and a servant presently appeared with a pitcher of iced lemonade and a platter of little cakes covered with honey.

"This looks like a land of plenty," said Mark, leaning back on a bench and taking a deep breath. "How fresh and green everything is! It seems to me a man ought to be able to make a living without half trying."

"The trouble down here has been the constant revolutions," answered the professor. "Nothing has been safe, and nobody felt like settling down to steady work. But that will pass away in time, and then South America will take a leap forward that will astonish those living in the North."

CHAPTER XVI

DARRY'S WILD RIDE

PROMPTLY at four o'clock Enrique Morano returned from the University. He found our friends taking it easy in the patio, in hammocks which Juan Greva had had strung there, under the giant palm.

"That is right, take it comfortably," he said, with a smile. "I am glad to see it. It is so hard to get the Yankees to rest a little. They want constantly to be on the go—to do something—to keep their brain at work. Here, in this warm climate, it would kill a man to keep at such a pace."

"It does make one lazy," returned Darry, as he sat up. "But you won't find me lazy when I get in the saddle."

"Then you love to ride?"

"He's crazy for a horse," put in Mark. "You see, his father is a big cattle dealer from Chicago, and Darry has been out on the ranches more than

once. I believe you once helped to break a bronco, didn't you, Darry?"

"Yes."

"Then I will have to provide you with an animal of spirit," said Enrique Morano, with another smile. "Very well, you shall have such a one."

"No, no, don't give him a fiery, untamed steed, Morano," interrupted Professor Strong. "Remember I am responsible for his well-being while we are in Venezuela."

"But I don't want an old—plug," said Darry, with a crestfallen look. "If the horse is broken I'd like to ride him even if he has some ginger in him. Father lets me ride what I please at home."

"Well, I'll take a look at the horse first," answered Professor Strong, slowly. "As to 'plugs,' as you term them, I don't think our host keeps any such."

"Oh, I didn't mean to insinuate that he did," said Darry, hastily.

They walked down to the long, low stable and the head hostler brought forth a number of the horses. Enrique Morano pointed out a big bay.

"That is the fellow," he said. "I can ride him, but he may prove too much for you."

"Let me try him," pleaded Darry.

The bay was saddled, and the youth leaped up, whip in hand. The horse pranced about a bit but soon set off at an easy gait. The step is called the *trote de paseo,* and is natural to the steeds in all upper South America.

"Why he's easy," sang out the boy, after riding up and down the horse yard and out to the highway and back. "I am sure I won't have a bit of trouble with him."

"He rides with confidence and well," observed Enrique Morano. "He ought to have no trouble on the road."

The matter was talked over, and finally Darry was allowed to ride the bay horse, which rejoiced in the name of *El Montero*—The Huntsman. The others were quickly provided with steeds, and a little later they left the plantation, Enrique Morano leading the way on a favorite black.

For a long distance the road was level and they moved off in a close bunch. Every one of the party had learned to ride years before, so there was no delay on that score. Mark and Frank wanted to race, but the professor would not hear of it.

Presently they crossed a heavy stone bridge, bearing this inscription:

THE ILLUSTRIOUS AMERICAN,
GENERAL ANTONIO GUZMAN BLANCO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,
HAD THIS BRIDGE ERECTED FOR
THE PUBLIC GOOD.

"What a funny inscription," observed Sam, as he stopped to read it aloud.

"General Antonio Guzman Blanco doesn't want himself forgotten," laughed Mark. "I have seen a dozen monuments with his name on them, and at least two dozen of his portraits."

"He was a great man in his day," said Enrique Morano, gravely. "A very great man. He made many improvements, such as building schools and libraries, making highways and waterworks, and bringing order out of disorder. But it would have been better had he not advertised himself quite so extensively."

"That's just it," said Frank, and added, under his breath to Darry: "You'd think he was trying to advertise some special brand of Stomach Bitters, wouldn't you?" And Darry had to bite his lip to keep from laughing outright.

"There isn't half left of President Guzman

Blanco's monuments that there once was," said Professor Strong. "After his downfall, and after the people became convinced that he was negotiating with foreign powers against their good, they took revenge by pulling down many of his statues, destroying his portraits and renaming many of the streets and parks christened in his honor. His fine plantation was ruined, and even the State that bore his name was renamed Miranda."

Across the bridge the road ascended a slight hill and then passed through an avenue of tropical trees beautiful beyond description. Birds were numerous and their music added to the delight of the riders.

"It's like a bit of paradise!" said Sam, as he drew rein, with Mark beside him. "Just look at that scenery. Did you ever behold anything so beautiful? See yonder waterfall, how it glistens in the sunshine and how gracefully the vines fall over the rocks beside it! What a spot for a painter!"

The others had also halted, all but Darry, who was secretly itching to "let the bay out," as he told himself. Now he saw his chance and away he went, before either Professor Strong or Enrique Morano noticed him. There was a turn a hundred yards ahead, and this gained, Darry whipped up the bay

and away they went up the hill and down the opposite side at a break-neck speed, the boy urging the horse on at every step.

"This is what I call riding! Whoop!" he called out. "Get up there, Huntsman, get up, I say!"

Soon he was out of sight and hearing of the others and still tearing along at a gait which was truly astonishing. But the bay acted well and he had small difficulty in keeping his seat. Indeed, he thought the riding even easier than some he had experienced while in our own west.

The downward slope of the hill left behind, Darry found himself confronted by a fork of the road. There was small time to decide and he took the branch to the south, as that looked more traveled than the other. But he had hardly gone a hundred yards before he noticed that the highway was somewhat cut up, as if some improvements were underway.

A short distance further on he came across a gang of native workmen, armed with picks, spades and shovels. They were digging a trench beside the road and some of them shouted to him as he rode past, but he did not understand a word they said.

"Can't stop me to-day, thank you!" he shouted back pleasantly, and urged on his steed as before.

The road now made another turn, among a mass of rocks and brushwood. Here it crossed a narrow rocky stream, where the water ran swiftly. The bridge was out of repair and the workmen were engaged in putting up a permanent stone structure to take its place.

"Go back! Go back!" shouted a foreman of the laborers, in Spanish. "Go back!" And he rushed forward to stop Darry's horse. But before he could do so, the youth was past him and riding on the old bridge, which sagged and trembled beneath the sudden weight.

"Gracious, this won't do," thought the boy, and tried to get the horse over the bridge with all possible speed.

He had just reached the end when there came a loud explosion, as terrifying as it was unexpected. The workmen were engaged in blasting rocks which stood in the way of the new bridge and had just set off a charge of dynamite. They had tried to warn him to go back, but he had not understood them.

As the explosion came horse and rider were lifted

into the air for several feet and before they landed again, each was struck by the shattered stone, which flew in all directions. The bay came down on his knees, throwing Darry over his head into the stream beneath the bridge. Then with a wild plunge the frightened steed went on, leaving the boy to his fate.

CHAPTER XVII

A TALK ABOUT BEASTS AND SNAKES

"DARRY has gone on ahead," observed Mark, looking down the road.

"He's off for a ride now!" cried Sam. "My, see him go!"

"He is foolish to ride so fast in this sun," said the professor, half angrily. "Darry, come back!"

But the call did not reach the flying youth, and he was soon out of sight. Scarcely had he disappeared when Enrique Morano gave a start.

"We must stop him," he ejaculated. "We must stop him before it is too late."

"Too late?" came from the others in alarm.

"Yes, too late. Below here are two roads and he may take the wrong one and go to the old bridge, which is worn out and not safe."

"Come!" The word came from the professor and without ado he urged his horse forward at twice the speed they had formerly employed. Enrique Morano

rode beside him and the boys brought up closely in the rear.

About half the distance to the old bridge was covered when the noise of the explosion reached their ears. Professor Strong gazed inquiringly at his old college friend.

"What can that mean, Morano?"

"They are working on the new bridge and are blasting rocks there. I trust the workmen warned the youth—if he took that road."

It was not long before they came upon the first of the workmen and the civil engineer questioned them.

"Yes, he came this way," said Enrique Morano, to the professor. "One man says he must have been right on the old bridge when the blast occurred."

"Pray heaven he is safe!" murmured Professor Strong, his face paling slightly.

When they reached the old bridge they found the workmen running down to the water's edge.

"He is here!" cried the foreman, to Morano. "His horse ran away and threw him. The blast was too much for the beast."

"Where is the boy?" demanded the professor, and having the direction pointed out to him, leaped

to the rocks and ran forward to the edge of the stream.

Darry lay on his back, partly in and partly out of the water. His eyes were closed and he was motionless.

"Poor boy, he looks as if he were dead!"

"No, no, don't say that Darry is dead!" cried Frank, who had come up by this time. "Perhaps he's only unconscious."

No one replied to this, but all rushed boldly into the stream. Soon they had raised the body up and carried it to a patch of grass under a tree. The professor got down on his knees to make an examination.

"He is alive!" he murmured, after a painful pause. "I believe he has only been stunned."

As he finished speaking Darry gave a shudder and opened his eyes.

"Whoa!" he murmured. "Whoa!" and then closed his eyes and gave a shiver.

"You are safe now, my boy," said the professor. "Take it easy. You are safe."

At last Darry opened his eyes again and gave a gasp.

"Wha—what does this mean?" he questioned,

slowly, and then put his hand to his side and gave a groan.

"Don't you remember the explosion?" asked Mark. "The horse must have thrown you."

"Yes, yes, I remember now. Is the—the horse all right?"

"Never mind the horse," put in Enrique Morano. "I sincerely trust you are not seriously injured."

"I've got a pain in my side, but I guess it won't amount to much," answered Darry and attempted to sit up. But the effort was too much and he sank back again.

"Rest as you are," said the professor, kindly. "We will get a carriage to take you back to the plantation."

"To be sure. I will go for the carriage myself," said Enrique Morano, and leaping into the saddle again he dashed down the highway with the best speed his steed could attain.

While Enrique Morano was gone Professor Strong made an examination of Darry. As a hunter and traveler he had had considerable experience in caring for the wounded and he soon learned that no bones were broken. The youth was simply bruised and in a few days would be as well as ever.

One of the workmen on the road had gone after the runaway horse and now returned, leading the bay, which was covered with foam and dust. The steed trembled with excitement and pranced around continuously.

It was half an hour before Enrique Morano appeared, driving the largest carriage of which his plantation boasted. Into this Darry was lifted carefully and Professor Strong rode beside him, to save him as much as possible from being jounced around.

"I have sent a servant for a doctor," said the civil engineer. "He will probably be at the house as soon as ourselves," and such proved to be a fact.

By nightfall Darry found himself lying on a cool and comfortable bed. A bruise on his head was bound up in a white bandage and there was another bandage over his hip. As the boy was naturally strong and healthy the physician said that medicine for him would be unnecessary.

"I'm glad he didn't make me take a big dose of something nasty" said Darry to Frank. "Some doctors do that, you know, just to let you think they are earning their fee," and Frank had to smile at this, it was so much like his chum's way of looking at things.

Under the circumstances it was impossible for the party to leave the plantation, and after some talk Professor Strong decided to accept Enrique Morano's invitation to remain there until the following Monday.

"That will give Hockley a chance to see the coffee plantation and learn how coffee is raised," said the professor. "I will go and bring him while you boys remain with Crane."

"It's queer Hockley hasn't come along on his own account," said Mark. "His friends must be off by this time."

"I know of no steamer sailing to-day," put in Enrique Morano, who stood near. "His friends must be going on some sailing vessel."

"Have you a list of the sailings?" asked Professor Strong, quickly.

"Yes, in the newspaper of yesterday. Here it is."

The professor took the paper and read the list with care. As Morano had said there was no sailing of any steamer. The sailing vessels to leave were two in number, one bound for Cape Town, South Africa and the other bound for Rio Janeiro, Brazil.

"I thought his friends were bound for Philadelphia," mused Professor Strong, and said no more.

But his eyes took on a speculative look as though he feared Hockley had not told the exact truth in the note which had been sent.

Dinner that evening was quite an elaborate affair and lasted fully an hour. When it was over, Enrique Morano insisted upon going into town with the professor.

"I am certain you boys can amuse yourselves while we are gone," he said, to Mark and the others. "Make yourselves at home. There are books and a piano, and in the corner are several portfolios of pictures to look over."

"All right, I guess we'll put in the time pleasantly enough," was Mark's answer, and soon the two men were gone and the boys found themselves alone, excepting for the servants that remained within call to wait on them.

The portfolios of pictures proved of great interest to all but Darry, who soon fell into a sound sleep, from which the others did not awaken him. In the collection of pictures were views of the great Cathedral at Caracas, the numerous Public Buildings, the Botanical Gardens, the wonderful railroad bridges around the mountains and over the valleys, the harbors at La Guayra, the waterways leading to the

mighty Orinoco, and views of the great river itself, showing the canyons to be found in certain localities and the fierce rapids. The latter views interested them most of all.

"I'm just aching to get on that river," said Frank. "What fun we will have, hunting, fishing and camping out! The cities are all well enough, but one gets tired of them after awhile."

"We haven't seen so very much of the cities yet," put in Sam.

"We've done up Caracas, and that's the main city. And we stopped at La Guayra, which is as important a seacoast town as they have."

"I'm with Frank on the river question," said Mark. "I hope I get a shot at some big game."

"The professor thinks there is no large game left in Venezuela," said Sam. "He said there were a number of animals of the cat variety like the puma, ounce and ocelot."

"I've heard there were jaguars here—in the big forests."

"The professor said there might be some but they were becoming very rare. You see, the people who have immense herds of cattle on the *llanos,* or

prairies, have to protect their stock and so they have hunted the wild beasts pretty thoroughly."

"I know other things they have, which we may fall in with, and they are just as bad as big game and maybe worse," said Mark.

"What are they?" asked Frank, with increased interest.

"Alligators, rattlesnakes and boa-constrictors."

"Ugh!" came from Sam, with a shiver. "Deliver me from a boa-constrictor. I saw one once in a menagerie. They fed it on live rabbits and the sight was enough to make one sick."

"The professor says the rattlesnakes are more to be feared than anything," went on Mark. He says the alligators and the boa-constrictors generally keep their distance, but the snakes strike you through the tall grass before you can realize what is up. I can tell you what, we'll have to keep our eyes open when we get down on the hunting ground."

CHAPTER XVIII

A BITTER DISCOVERY

Hockley sat up on the bed and stared around him in stupid bewilderment. For the moment he could realize nothing but that he had a bursting headache and felt wretched all over.

"It was the drinking and smoking that did it," he thought and gave a low groan. "Oh, my head!"

For several minutes he sat almost motionless, trying to collect his senses. Then he gazed around the room and at last realized that he was in the apartment which Dan Markel had engaged.

"Markel!" he called out. "Markel, where are you?"

Receiving no answer, he dragged himself to his feet. He was all in a tremble and soon sank down in a chair by the barred window. He saw that the sun was up and that the street was alive with people.

"It must be pretty late," he muttered, and felt for his watch to note the time. "Oh, I forgot. The watch was stolen, and so was my roll of bills. This

is a pretty how-do-you-do, anyway. What will the professor say when he hears of it? But I don't care—he ain't my master, and I'm going to do as I please." He put his hand to his forehead. "Oh, how everything spins!"

There was a wash basin and some water handy and the lad bathed himself, after which he felt slightly better. As he was re-arranging his collar and tie he began to wonder what had become of his friend.

"Perhaps he has gone to hunt up my watch and money," he thought. "Hope he gets them. Dad will be awful mad over that watch, I know. He cautioned me to be careful of it when he gave it to me."

Hockley waited for quarter of an hour longer and then, out of patience, rang for an attendant.

"Where is Mr. Markel?" he asked. "See if you can find him."

"*Si, señor,*" said the servant, who understood a little English and was kept to wait on Americans.

After the man was gone Hockley sat down by the window again and gave himself up to his reflections. They were far from pleasant.

"That cock fight was a fizzle," he muttered.

"Markel must take me for a fool to cart me off to such a place. I've a good mind to tell him so, too, when he comes. If he can't take me to better places than that I'll cut him."

Hockley's head continued to ache, and the quarter of an hour he had to wait ere the servant returned seemed an age to him.

"Mr. Markel cannot be found, *señor,*" was the report. "I have searched all over the place, but it is of no use."

"He isn't in the dining room?"

"No *señor.*"

"Did you see him go out?"

"I did not, *señor.*"

"He didn't leave any word at the office?"

"He did not, *señor.*"

"It's mighty queer what has become of him. I'll go out and look for him myself."

Leaving the apartment Hockley strolled into the office and took a look up and down the hot street and then into the wine-room. Of course he saw nothing of the man from Baltimore, who was now miles away. Much bewildered but still unsuspicious he went back to the office.

"He must have gone away shortly after you sent

for your bag," said the hotel keeper, who also spoke English.

"After I sent for my bag?" repeated Hockley. "I sent for no bag."

"No?" The hotel keeper looked astonished. "He said you wished it, and we sent a boy after it. He took it to your room."

"I haven't seen the bag," answered Hockley, and then his heart sank suddenly within him, for he remembered telling Markel of the secret compartment. What if the man from Baltimore had played him false?

"The bag must be in your room," went on the hotel man stoutly. "I saw it carried in myself."

"I'll go and look," returned the lank youth and almost ran back to the apartment. At first he failed to locate the valise but presently discovered it under the bed and hauled it forth.

"Robbed! Every cent gone!" The cry came straight from Hockley's heart, and trembling from head to foot he sank into a chair, the picture of misery and despair.

"You are robbed?" asked the hotel keeper, who had followed him to the door.

"Yes, robbed! That man has taken all of my money."

"But he was your friend!" ejaculated the other, in bewilderment.

"He pretended to be my friend," answered the youth, bitterly. "I met him on the steamer from New York. He was a stranger up to that time."

"And an American! It is very sad, *señor*. What will you do? Put the police on his track?"

"I don't know what to do. I'm strapped—I haven't a dollar to my name."

At this the brow of the hotel keeper darkened.

"Who then will pay your bill?" he asked sharply

"My bill?"

"Yes, *señor*. I am a poor man, for the hotel business is not very good this year. I cannot afford to lose what is coming to me."

"You'll have to lose it!" cried Hockley, angrily. "I've been duped, don't you understand? Cleaned out. How can I pay you?"

"But you are with another party, at the big hotel. They told me up there of it."

"That's true, but I'm not going to pay Markel's bill, I can tell you that," snorted Hockley.

"You have some baggage in that bag. I shall hold it."

"If you do not pay I shall tell the police it is a scheme to cheat me out of my money," was the sullen answer. "You have some baggage, that bag, I shall hold it until I am paid. You shall not remove it."

At this Hockley was horrified, feeling that he was getting deeper and deeper into difficulty.

"Haven't you any pity on a fellow who has been cleaned out?" he pleaded.

"I am a poor man—I must have my money," returned the hotel keeper, stoutly.

"All right, you shall have it," answered Hockley. "But you'll have to wait until I get back to the other hotel and get the cash."

"I will go with you," answered the hotel keeper, who was unwilling to trust the youth out of his sight.

Valise in hand Hockley tramped back to the hotel at which our friends were stopping. He fully expected to find Professor Strong and the others awaiting him, and wondered what explanation he should make concerning his plight.

When he learned that all were at the plantation still he did not know whether to be glad or sorry. He hunted out the hotel clerk and asked concerning the professor and the others.

"I would like to borrow a little money until they get back," he said. "Professor Strong will make it good when he settles up."

The money was at once forthcoming, and Hockley settled up with the keeper of the Hotel Ziroda. He would not pay for Markel, and the hotel man said he would keep whatever had been left behind until the bill was settled. But the man from Baltimore had left little of value outside of a newspaper containing some dirty linen.

It was a very crestfallen youth who slipped into the dining room for breakfast and one who was in a humor to eat but little. As he gulped down a cup of coffee Hockley meditated on the situation. He wanted to smooth matters over with Professor Strong but did not see his way clear to doing it.

"I suppose I'll have to face the music in the end," he thought, with a long sigh. "Oh, what a downright fool I was, to be taken in so easily! If the other fellows hear of it how they will laugh at me!"

When Professor Strong arrived in the evening he saw at once that something out of the ordinary had occurred. Hockley sat in his room, his head tied up in a towel.

"What is the matter, Hockley?" he asked.

"I've had bad luck, sir," whined the youth. "Awfully bad luck."

"Why, how is that?"

"I fell in with that Dan Markel, sir—after I had left those friends I mentioned in the note. Markel is a villain. He induced me to go off with him last night, and then he drugged and robbed me."

"Is it possible! I did not like the looks of the man when first we met on the steamer. But I thought we left him behind at Curaçao."

"He came on after us. He was a sly one, I can tell you, sir. You know I said I wanted to see the lumber yards, so that I could write to my father and tell him how business was carried on here. Well, he said he knew all about them and would show me around. So I went with him after my friends sailed and instead of showing me around he took me to some kind of a hotel. I had some cocoa and it was drugged and after that I didn't know a thing until I woke up at the Hotel Ziroda and found my watch and money gone. And what was worse the villain had sent for my valise and robbed that too."

This mixture of truth and falsehood was told very adroitly, and Professor Strong could not but believe the tale. He hurried to the other hotel and inter-

viewed the proprietor, and then notified the police of what had occurred. An alarm was sent out and a hunt made for Dan Markel, but the man from Baltimore could not be found.

Professor Strong wished to know something about the friends Hockley had met, but the youth pretended to be too sick to talk. He had been clever enough to look over the sailings in the newspaper and said they had gone on the *Desdemona* to Rio Janeiro, and were going from that port to Philadelphia.

As the youth seemed too sick to journey to the plantation Professor Strong remained with him all night, and Enrique Morano went back alone to carry the news to the others.

"Humph! we are having all sorts of excitement," was Mark's comment. "First it was myself, then it was Darry, and now it's Hockley. I wonder what will happen next?"

CHAPTER XIX

BATHING AT MACUTO

During the time that Darry was ill, the others took the railroad to Valencia and stopped half a day in that ancient town, which is one of the most picturesque in all of South America. They visited Lake Valencia, lying far above sea level, and Enrique Morano took them to a cathedral in the vicinity where can be seen a number of rare religious paintings. On the way back a stop was made at Victoria, once the place where Bolivar lived and where a great number of relics of the departed great man are stored.

Darry's sickness did not last, and inside of five days he announced that he would be able to go anywhere. "But I shan't try to run away again on a horse," he added, with a rueful smile.

The boys had endeavored to question Hockley about his experience with Dan Markel, but could get no satisfaction. Once Hockley flew in a rage at Sam over this.

"It's my business, not yours," he growled. "I lost the money and the watch. You only want to crow over me, but let me tell you, if you go too far somebody will get a thrashing."

"I don't want to crow at all, Hockley," returned Sam. "I thought that perhaps I might be able to help you—if this Markel ever shows himself again."

"He won't show himself—he's too cute," grumbled the other. "Now you just keep quiet about it." And there the subject was dropped, so far as it reached the injured one.

"He's sore, no doubt of that," said Frank to Sam, when told of the conversation. "And I don't blame him. Just the same, I'll wager he went off with Markel to have a good time."

"I think that too, Frank. Well, if he went too far, he's had to pay for it," returned Sam.

All told, the stay at the coffee plantation had been full of interest and the boys thanked Enrique Morano over and over again for his kindness to them.

"If you ever come to New York we'll do all we can for you," said Mark, heartily, and the others spoke in a similar strain.

The next day found them back to Caracas and here

they stopped but a few hours before taking a train for La Guayra. Arriving at the seaport arrangements were made for a side trip, so to speak, to the Gulf and the Lake of Maracaibo, situated to the westward. But the vessel was not to sail until two days later, so while waiting they took a little run over to Macuto, located not far from La Guayra.

"Macuto is the Bar Harbor, Asbury Park, and Coney Island of Venezuela," explained the professor, while the party was on the way, along a highway skirting the ocean. "It is only six miles from the seaport, and is a great resort for the folks in Caracas and La Guayra who wish to escape the extreme heat of those towns. It gets a constant breeze from the north and as a consequence is usually ten to fifteen degrees more on the side of comfort."

On arriving at Macuto the boys were somewhat disappointed to find the greater part of the beach highway given over to drinking places and general stores, while the hotels were further up on the hills behind the sand.

"Can't we go in bathing?" asked Sam. It was a sport he enjoyed exceedingly.

"Yes, there is a bathing spot, at the end of the highway," answered the professor, and thither they

made their way. The bathing pavilion was built in the shape of a castle, standing in the water at the end of a long wharf.

The boys were soon inside, and each paid his medio for a bathroom and the use of a towel. They soon discovered that the men bathed in one place and the women in another, and that but few suits were used. But suits were to be had at an office in a corner of the building and they procured these and all went in, including the professor, who was an excellent swimmer.

"Tell you what, this is something like!" cried Sam, enthusiastically, as he splashed about and then scooped some water up over Frank's head. "Come on, I'll race you!"

"Done!" answered Frank, who was also a good swimmer, and in another moment the two lads were off, while a crowd, composed largely of natives, watched them.

There was not much danger, as the bathing spot is enclosed by rows of piling, over which the surf booms constantly. The water was warm and clean. The race was to the stone wall which divides the men's space from that of the women's and both reached the goal at the same time.

"A tie!" shouted Mark. "Better call it off," and they did and went in for diving and plunging and "horse play" to their heart's content. Even Hockley seemed to thaw out over the fun and joined in as readily as anybody.

After the bath the entire party paid a visit to several of the leading hotels, stopping at one for a shell-fish dinner which was as delicious as any they had ever eaten. At the hotel was a native orchestra playing operatic airs and popular songs. Seeing the Americans the leader started his men to playing what was then the popular song in New York. This pleased Mark and Frank, and when a collection was taken they did not forget to contribute.

"By Jove!" cried Hockley, as they were on the point of leaving the hotel. "It's him!"

"Him? Who?" asked Mark, who stood beside the lank youth.

"Dan Markel. He just went into that store over yonder!"

"Then you had better tell the professor and have him arrested."

"I will."

Professor Strong was just settling their bill when Hockley acquainted him with what he had seen.

"To be sure, we must catch him," he cried. "Lead the way."

Hockley set off on a run, with the professor beside him, and the others bringing up the rear. Markel had entered a *bodega,* or grocery, which were numerous in that particular vicinity.

Markel was buying something in the shop when, on glancing up, he saw Hockley rush in, followed by Professor Strong and the others. They all made directly for the fellow, who found himself surrounded almost before he realized it.

"Give me my watch and that money," ejaculated Hockley, in quick rage, and caught the man from Baltimore by the sleeve.

"Hullo, what's the matter?" demanded the man, trying to put on a bold front.

"I'll show you what's the matter," blustered Hockley. "Give me the watch and money I say."

"You must be crazy. I haven't anything belonging to you."

"And I say you have."

"Hockley says that you robbed him while he was in your company last week," put in Professor Strong. "I think you had better come with us to the police station."

"The boy doesn't tell the truth. He drank too much and got in a crowd, and when he came out his money and watch were gone. I had nothing to do with it."

"I say it's not so," ejaculated Hockley, growing red at being exposed. "You sent for my valise and robbed that, too. I can prove you sent for it by the proprietor of the Hotel Ziroda."

At this shot Dan Markel grew pale. He felt that he was cornered and that a visit to the police station would do much to prove his guilt. He had left the watch behind him, but he had Hockley's money—or the larger portion of it—on his person, and he did not know but that some of the bills could be identified.

"It—it's all a mistake," he faltered.

"You come to the police station with us," said Professor Strong, quietly but sternly.

Dan Markel looked around. There seemed no way of escape and his face fell.

"All right, I'll go with you," he said, although he had no such intention. "But let me tell you that you are making a big mistake, and that you'll have a suit for damages on your hands."

"I'll risk the suit," returned the professor, grimly.

All marched out of the *bodega,* much to the astonishment of the proprietor, who had not understood a word of what was said. On the corner they paused.

"There ought to be a policeman somewhere——" began Professor Strong, when without warning, Dan Markel tore himself loose and leaped into the street. Several carriages were passing and in a twinkling he had darted between these and was running for an alleyway not far distant.

"He's running away!" burst out Hockley. "Come on after him!" And he started to follow, and so did the others. But the street was so crowded that it took several seconds to gain the other side, and by that time Markel was out of sight.

"I saw where he went," said Mark. "Into the alleyway. Come on, Hockley."

"I'm with you," was the answer, and both boys hurried on as fast as the condition of the thoroughfare would permit.

Dan Markel was thoroughly alarmed, for he felt that if he was captured Professor Strong would see to it that he was given a long term of imprisonment.

"They shan't get me this trip," he muttered to himself, and seeing a doorway open close at hand, darted through this, into a large warehouse. From

the entrance he made his way among a number of boxes and barrels to the rear. Beyond was another alleyway and he leaped into this. With all the speed left to him he managed in a few minutes to gain the boulevard where the carriages ran between Macuto and La Guayra. A vehicle containing only a couple of passengers was passing and he leaped into this.

"I wish to get to La Guayra as soon as possible," he said to the driver. 'An extra bolivar for you if you whip up your horses."

"*Si, señor,*" was the answer, and the driver cracked his whip. Away went the turnout; and that was the last seen of Dan Markel for some time to come.

CHAPTER XX

A SHORT VOYAGE WESTWARD

Two days later found our friends on board a steamer bound for the Gulf of Maracaibo. The weather was all that could be desired, and for the most part all were in excellent spirits, the single exception being Hockley, who still mourned the loss of his money and timepiece.

"It's a shame we didn't catch Dan Markel in Macuto," said the lank youth more than once. "I think we might have done it if the professor hadn't been so slow to act."

"We did all we could," had been Mark's answer. "But that Markel is a mighty slick one, and we'll have to get up bright and early to corner him."

Although the others did not know it, Professor Strong had given Hockley a severe lecture on the return to La Guayra, telling the youth of the folly of associating with a man of Markel's character, and of the further foolishness of drinking and trying to be a so-called sport.

"You will ruin both your health and your character by such actions," the professor had said. "A young man who will act in that fashion shows a lack of common sense. I want no more of it." And though Hockley had felt strongly inclined to "talk back" he had not had the courage to do so.

The steamer sailing from La Guayra to the Gulf of Maracaibo made a stop at Curaçao, so that little could be seen of the coast line between La Guayra and Cape St. Roman, at the entrance to the gulf. The stop at Willemstad was of short duration and nobody of the party went ashore. Then the course was straight around the cape into the gulf, which is nothing less than an inlet of the Caribbean Sea, seventy-five miles deep and about twice as broad.

The Gulf and the Lake of Maracaibo are connected by an irregular strait twenty miles long and five to ten miles wide. The lake itself is a hundred miles long and three-quarters that in width. It is very deep, so that large vessels can sail on it almost from end to end. But big vessels cannot get in or out because the strait is shallow and filled with shifting bars of sand.

"What a picturesque spot," was Sam's comment, as the steamer made her landing at Maracaibo, which

is situated upon the strait. "And it looks as if they did a big business here."

"Yes, a very large business is done here," answered Professor Strong. "They export millions of pounds of coffee and cocoa each year, besides hides, cotton, and other articles of commerce."

They were soon ashore and took a trip on the street railways, which stretch a dozen miles or more in various directions. On every side was the greatest of activity, the wharves being as full of life as those at New York city. There were electric lights and telephones the same as at Caracas.

"They are up to date, that's sure," said Mark. "Anybody who comes down here expecting to find a howling wilderness will have his eyes opened."

"The country would progress even more rapidly were it not for many things beyond human control," returned the professor. "But the heat is at times terrific and the fever lays many low, and then they have had some awful earthquakes and tidal waves here."

After the ride the party visited various public buildings and public parks, with their statues of Bolivar, Guzman Blanco and other celebrities.

"We are now in the State of Zulia," said Pro-

fessor Strong, "and not over ninety miles from the eastern boundary of Colombia. This State contains about 100,000 inhabitants, of which 30,000 live in this city. A good deal of the trade you see here comes over the mountains from Colombia on mule-back. Several railroads are contemplated, and when they are built Maracaibo will be one of the most important points for shipping in the northern part of South America."

The party stopped for two days at Maracaibo, visiting several towns in the vicinity, which, however, were of small importance. On the second day Frank proposed that they hire one of the native boats for a short sail on the lake.

"Just so we can tell the folks at home that we sailed on Lake Maracaibo," he said.

"Hurrah, just the thing!" cried Sam. "I'd like that first rate."

The others were equally enthusiastic, and soon a boat was procured, something similar to a sloop, but with the sail running directly to the masthead. A native was in charge who could speak a little English, and he agreed to take them down the lake for a distance of a dozen miles and bring them back early in the evening.

With a basket filled with good things procured at their hotel, the party embarked at one of the long, low piers, and soon the mainsail was set and they were speeding away over the clear waters of the lake at a rate of seven knots an hour. The craft was a staunch built affair and minded her helm to perfection.

"I see you know how to handle her," said Mark, to the boatman, who rejoiced in the name of Salvador.

"*Si, señor,*" was the answer. "I been a boatman since a little baby so big," and Salvador smiled broadly.

"What do you do with the boat, fish?"

"Fish when weather good, *señor*. When weather no good carry cocoa and t'ings, or go to sleep."

"Go to sleep is good," laughed Frank. "That's one thing everybody down here seems able to do."

Mark and Frank had purchased some fishing tackle in the town and as they sailed they threw out lines behind for trolling. Salvador showed them how to bait up to the best advantage and soon Mark found he had a bite. He hauled in without delay and brought on deck a bass weighing all of a pound and a half.

"First haul!" he shouted, highly pleased.

"Here is another," cried Frank, and brought in an equally big fish. All examined the catches with care but saw little difference from the fish caught nearer home.

"Any electric eels here?" asked the professor of the boatman.

"I have heard of a few but I never see them, *señor.*"

"Electric eels?" repeated Hockley. "Do they come from Venezuela?"

"Yes, we'll find them in the Orinoco, Hockley,—big ones too. We will have to be careful when we go fishing there, unless we want to get a shock."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of an eel," returned the other. "I saw an electric eel once, in an aquarium at Chicago, but he didn't have much electricity in him."

"Then he must have been almost exhausted. A strong healthy electric eel can give a man as much of a shock as anybody wants, I can assure you."

Inside of two hours the boys had a string of ten good sized fish, and then the professor told them they had better stop the sport as it delayed the

progress of the boat. So the lines were hauled in, after which they progressed faster than ever. A stiff breeze was blowing and the sky was cloudless.

"We couldn't have a nicer day for this trip," said Darry, and all agreed with him.

Salvador knew of a beautiful grove on the shore of the lake, and to this he directed their course. There was a little stretch of sand, backed up by a grove of stately palms, and behind this some rocks and a waterfall.

"Oh, if only I had my camera," sighed Sam. He had brought along a photographic outfit but unfortunately had left it at the hotel. The rocks and the waterfall looked very inviting, and they took their dinner in sight of the place but under the palms, for the sun was hot in spite of the breeze.

After the meal some of the boys stretched out for a rest. Sam wished to go swimming but at this the native boatman shook his head.

"No go here," said Salvador. "Go in water, maybe git bit by crab. Bad crab here."

"Crabs?" said Sam. "I haven't seen any."

"Me show you," returned the boatman and led the way along the sand. Procuring a sharp stick,

he walked along until he came to a round hole close to the water's edge. He thrust the stick into the hole. Instantly came a scattering of sand and an ugly looking brown crab came into view, hissing viciously and with his eyes bulging from their sockets. Sam sprang back to get out of harm's way but the crab leaped into the lake and sank from sight.

"What an ugly beast!"

"Him more ugly if you stick toe in his hole," grinned Salvador. "Maybe him bite toe off."

"I believe you," and Sam gave a shudder. "A nice beach for swimming truly!"

"The land crabs of South America are all more or less dangerous," said Professor Strong, who had watched proceedings from a distance. "Some of them are poisonous and all will give you a nasty bite if they get the chance. You must never bathe unless you feel certain there is nothing around to harm you."

It was not until half an hour later that they prepared to leave the spot. Some clouds had come up and Salvador said he was afraid they might be in for a blow before nightfall.

"I wouldn't mind a little wind, just for the excitement," said Frank.

"Yes, but we don't want too much," returned the professor. "They are as liable to have squalls on Lake Maracaibo as they are on any of our great lakes at home."

"Do you think we'll get a squall?" cried Hockley, in something of alarm.

"I trust not, Hockley. If it blows too heavily we'll have to run in shore somewhere until it is over."

They were soon aboard the boat, the mainsail was hoisted, and away they ran, in the direction of the town. The wind was so fresh that the spray flew in all directions so that it was impossible to find a dry spot. Hockley grumbled at this, but there seemed no help for it.

"As it is warm it won't hurt you," said Professor Strong. "As soon as we reach the hotel I will see to it that all have dry clothing."

An hour later found them out of sight of land and bowling along as swiftly as ever. The sky was now growing darker, the sun having gone behind a heavy bank of clouds. Presently the wind died out completely, leaving the sail flapping idly.

"We're getting a calm instead of a storm," said Frank. "And just as we were making such good time, too!"

"It's the calm before the storm, Newton," answered Professor Strong. "We'll get more wind than we want in half an hour."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SQUALL ON LAKE MARACAIBO

WHAT Professor Strong said proved to be true. In less than half an hour they saw the whitecaps forming on the lake behind them. The wind came and went in fitful gusts, and then of a sudden came a blow that was little short of a hurricane.

"We're going to catch it now!" shouted Mark. "Just hear how it whistles!"

"Hold fast, all of you!" came from Professor Strong.

"We are holding fast," answered Darry, who was clinging to the stern sheets with might and main.

The sail had long since been taken in and Salvador stood at his rudder, doing his best to keep the craft up to the wind. But this was no easy task for the wind was veering around rapidly.

"Gracious, it's down on us for keeps!" shouted Frank, a moment later. "Look at that!"

He bobbed his head forward and looking the other

boys made out a low wall of white foam moving on them with incredible swiftness. There was a strange humming in the air and the sky became blacker than ever.

In a twinkling the squall was on them in all its fury, sending the sloop headlong into the foam. The boys could see nothing and held their breath in awful suspense. Hockley fairly shivered with terror, but none of the others noted this, being too busy caring for their own safety.

As the sloop veered around, the boiling foam mounted to the forward deck and Sam was caught as in the breakers of the ocean. He was clinging to a low guard, unaware that the thing was partly rotted away. Without warning came a cracking and before he realized it he was over the side.

Down and down, and still down went poor Sam, until he felt that he must be going straight to the bottom of the lake. He was so bewildered that for several seconds he scarcely knew what to do. He turned over and over and clutched out wildly, reaching nothing but the water, which, at this distance below the surface, was as calm as ever.

At last the youth struck out for the surface. He wanted to breathe but knew that if he opened his

mouth and took in the water it might prove fatal to him. His head began to grow dizzy and a strange pain shot across his chest. Then he came up, opened his eyes and gave a gasp.

"I went overboard," was his thought. "Where can the sloop be?"

He tried to call out, but his puny effort was drowned completely by the wind, which whistled as fiercely as ever. On every side of him the water boiled and foamed as before and he was thrown around like a cork, often turning over and going beneath the surface.

The next few minutes were to the boy little short of an age. He strained his eyes for some sign of the sloop but could see absolutely nothing of the vessel. He was alone on the broad bosom of Lake Maracaibo!

Alone! It was an awful thought and as it flashed over his mind he felt his heart sink like a lump of lead in his bosom. Alone! Would they come back for him, or would he be left there to drown?

"They ought to come back," he muttered. "They *must* come back! Oh, God spare me!" And the prayer was repeated over and over again.

It gave him strength, and he struck out as best he could, determined to keep afloat as long as possible.

All told the squall did not last over twenty minutes, but to poor Sam it seemed an age. He made scant progress through the milklike foam, but this did not matter, since he knew not in what direction he was heading.

"I may be going away from the sloop and away from land too," he thought dismally. "But I've got to do something," and he continued to swim.

His strength was nearly gone when he bumped into something hard. Laying hold of the object he found it was a spar, which, from its general appearance, had been in the water for many months. He clasped the spar tightly and this sustained him without further aid.

The gusts of wind had been followed by a heavy downpour of rain and this continued for all of half an hour. It was still dark and Sam could not make out in what direction he was drifting. At last, however, he saw a dim outline of land ahead and did his best to shove the spar in that direction. His feet touched bottom, and more dead than alive he dragged himself out of the lake and flung himself

headlong in some rank grass under a clump of wild plantains.

When Sam sat up he found the storm going down and the setting sun trying to break through the clouds. The rain had ceased and the bosom of the lake, while still covered with whitecaps, was gradually resuming its normal condition.

"What an experience!" he murmured, as he looked out upon the water. "Wonder if the sloop weathered it or went to the bottom? Oh, if only all the rest are safe!"

He arose to his feet but found himself so weak that he was glad enough to rest again. He was on a bit of an island for behind him was a wide ditch which separated the patch from the mainland. In the distance was a hill backed up by a lofty mountain. Not a human being nor a habitation of any sort was in sight.

"I'm alone and no mistake," he mused. "I wonder how I had best strike out? Let me see, by the way the sun lies I must be on the eastern shore of the lake and if that's so I'm opposite to the strait where the town is situated. I'm sure I can't see how I'm going to get back to Maracaibo."

Before Sam could make up his mind how to move

darkness was upon him—the darkness of the tropics, which descends without warning. At this he sprang up in added alarm.

"I can't remain here all night," he thought. "At least I don't want to. The place may be full of snakes and those uncanny land crabs. I must get up on higher ground if nothing else."

He set out for the hill he had noticed, but before he had gone a hundred yards, found himself in the mire surrounding the ditch.

"This won't do," he muttered and started to go back, but only ended by getting in deeper until he was up to his knees. He was now thoroughly alarmed and came to a standstill almost in despair.

Had it been light Sam might have seen that not far away was a firm stretch of ground leading up to the hill. But he could not see this and so deemed it best to get back to where he had first landed.

Retracing his steps was not easy and once he fell, covering his arms and breast with mud. When he did get back to the wild plantains he was a sight to behold and it took him some time to regain his wind.

"I'm a prisoner on this bit of marshland—that's all there is to it," he mused, as he flung himself down near the edge of the lake. "I suppose I've

got to make the best of it until morning. But how am I going to pass the night?"

At the risk of stirring up some of the dreaded crabs, he waded into the lake and washed himself of the mud. Then he wrung out his jacket and hung it up to dry. Fortunately it was a hot night, so there was no danger of catching cold.

The squall had driven away a good many of the mosquitoes, which infest Lake Maracaibo almost as numerously as they do Staten Island, but now the little pests began to return and presently Sam found himself kept busy by them and also by a species of gnats which are equally annoying. To save himself from their bites he tied his wet handkerchief over his head and neck.

In planning for the trip Mark had mentioned how handy it would be for each to take along a waterproof match-safe and Sam had provided himself with one of these. Satisfied that he would have to remain where he was for some hours at the least, he hunted around for some dry grass and plantain leaves and proceeded to build himself a smudge fire. This burnt slowly because of the dampness and the thick smoke soon put the most of the gnats and mosquitoes to flight.

"I heard something, what was it?"

The fire, dim as it was, gave an air of cheerfulness to the spot, and Sam felt much better as he watched it glow up and then droop. He did not let it go out, but kept piling on the grass, which he tore up in clods with ease. This grass is of the wire variety, very strong, and is much used by the natives in making baskets and various household articles.

It must have been close to midnight when Sam fell into a doze, being so worn out he could scarcely hold up his head. He had piled the fire as high as possible and his only danger was that the smoke might veer around and choke him to death.

How long he dozed he could not tell exactly, afterward, nor could he tell what awoke him. But he opened his eyes with a start and was on his feet almost before he was aware.

"I heard something," he told himself. "What was it?"

He listened but only a faint breeze blowing through the grass and wild plantains reached his ears. He strained his eyes, yet only the total darkness met his gaze.

Much alarmed Sam continued to stand on guard. He had cut himself the stalk of a young plantain

with his jack-knife and he held this in his hands, at the same time keeping as close to the fire as possible, knowing that all wild beasts dread anything burning.

CHAPTER XXII

PORT OF THE HAIR

"WHERE is Sam?"

Such was the question which came from Mark, after the worst of the blow was over.

"Samuel?" queried Professor Strong, quickly. "Isn't he at the bow?"

"No, sir."

"He must have gone overboard!" ejaculated Darry. "Sam! Sam! where are you?"

"He did go overboard," panted Hockley, who had just been clearing his mouth of lake water. "I saw him go."

"Then why didn't you give the alarm?" demanded the professor indignantly. "How long ago was this?"

"Only half a minute, sir. I would have spoken before, but that last wave almost drowned me."

"Sam! Sam!" called the others in concert, and listened attentively for an answer. When none came they looked at each other in increasing alarm.

"Did you see the boy go overboard?" asked the professor of the native boatman.

Salvador shook his head. "See noddings," he said. "I do best to keep boat from turning up, *señor.*"

"We must turn back for him," went on Professor Strong.

"Turn back, *señor?* Dat is dangerous," and the native shook his head.

"Perhaps, but we must go back, nevertheless. Here, I will help you bring her around. Boys, watch for him, two to the right and two to the left. We must find and save him."

"Yes! yes!" said Frank. "Poor Sam! What would his mother say if he was drowned!"

The sloop came around with difficulty and for the moment threatened to swamp herself. As the water rolled up, Hockley gave a groan of terror.

"Don't, please don't!" he whined. "We'll all go to the bottom next. Head her for land!"

"Cling fast and you will be safe," answered Professor Strong, who was as cool as ever, although deeply concerned over Sam's welfare.

"But we'll go down—I know we will," pleaded the lank youth.

"We are bound to save Sam, so shut up," cried Mark, getting angry. "Sam may be nothing to you but he is a good deal to us," and thereupon Hockley became silent, although he shivered with fear every time the sloop made an extra heavy lurch.

In the midst of the wind and rain it was hard to follow the back course correctly and without knowing it they passed far to the westward of where Sam had gone overboard.

"I can't see a thing," remarked Mark, after a painful silence lasting nearly quarter of an hour.

"Nor I," returned Frank.

"It's raining too hard to see much," came from Darry.

"It is gradually letting up," said the professor. "And he must be somewhere in this neighborhood."

They continued to cruise around until the sun went down, much to Hockley's disgust.

"It's no use," said the lank youth. "He's gone to the bottom and that's all there is to it."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to speak so, Jake Hockley!" retorted Mark. "Haven't you any heart?"

"Of course I have, Mark Robertson, but I know a

thing or two. If he was afloat we'd have found him long ago."

"We will continue the search if it takes all night," came from the professor. "I cannot believe that poor Winthrop is drowned."

"Poor Beans" murmured Darry, and the tears started to his eyes. "Such a good chap as he was!" And he felt almost like hurling Hockley overboard because of his heartlessness.

Upon questioning Salvador, the professor learned that there was a long stretch of marshland not a great way off and that it was possible that Sam had found his way in that direction.

"It is a mile, *scñor*. He would have to be a very good swimmer to reach it," said the boatman.

"We'll sail over to it anyway," answered Professor Strong. "We must do something."

The course of the sloop was changed and they moved slowly for the marshland, beating against the wind. Darry was at the bow watching eagerly for any sign of life which might appear.

"I see something in the water, dead ahead" he sang out presently and all rushed forward to investigate. At first they felt sure it must be Sam's body

but as they drew closer found it was nothing but a mass of seaweed with some rubbish on top.

"Too bad!" came from Hockley. "I thought the search was ended."

"I'm glad we didn't find him drowned," answered Frank.

They were interrupted by a cry from the professor. "I see a light ahead, low down as if on the water's edge. It looks like a signal."

"It must be a signal," said the native boatman. "No house dare—no people live dare. All wet ground and mud, *señor.*"

As they drew closer to the fire the professor let out a long and loud cry:

"Winthrop! Sam Winthrop! Is that you?"

No answer came back and once again the boys felt a keen disappointment. But the course of the sloop was not changed and soon they were so close to the fire that they could see around it quite plainly.

"Somebody is there," ejaculated Mark.

"Yes, and it's either Sam or his ghost," added Frank. "Hullo, Beans!" he yelled, at the top of his lungs.

The figure at the fire, which had been watching

landward, with club upraised, turned suddenly and peered into the darkness of the lake.

"Who calls?"

"Beans, true enough!" came from Mark.

"Are you safe, Winthrop?" asked the professor, and then the sloop came up, ramming her bow deeply in the mud of the bank. In another moment the crowd was surrounding Sam and the boys were hugging him warmly.

"Yes, I'm safe," answered Sam, when he felt able to speak. "I—I went to sleep and woke up thinking some wild animal was going to attack me. I've had a pretty hard time of it, I can tell you."

"We've all had a hard time," grumbled Hockley. "We've been looking for you for hours."

"When I went overboard I thought I'd be drowned sure," went on Sam, and then he related his story from beginning to end. "I can tell you, I want no more Lake Maracaibo squalls."

"Nor do we," came from Mark. "It was worse than the one I once experienced on Lake George,—when our yacht, the Firefly, was dashed on the rocks and ruined."

"Let us all be truly thankful for Winthrop's escape," put in the professor. "It was the act of an

all-wise and all-powerful Providence that has spared him."

The little party remained around the fire for quite a while, talking of the storm and drying their clothing. Then the blaze was kicked into the water and they boarded the sloop once more.

"Are you quite sure we won't have any more squalls?" asked Sam, of the native boatman.

"Storm gone now—no come back to-night," answered Salvador.

Once aboard of the sloop the course was straight for Maracaibo. But the wind had gone down and it was not until after sunrise that they ran into the harbor and landed.

"Well, I guess you won't forget Lake Maracaibo in a hurry," said Mark to Sam, as they walked to their hotel.

"You're right I won't," was the reply. "One such adventure is enough in a lifetime."

They were just in time for breakfast and never did a meal taste better for, as Darry expressed it, "they were all as hungry as Tomcats locked out for the summer." An hour was spent at the hotel and then they hurried away to catch the steamer back to La Guayra.

"I'm going to take a nap when I get on board," said Mark, and this he did, and the others followed his example. They slept for several hours and did not stir until the steamer ran into the harbor of Puerto Cabello, situated directly north of Valencia, and thirty miles by railroad from that city.

"Puerto Cabello means the Port of the Hair," explained Professor Strong. "The harbor is so safe that it was said in olden times that a ship could be anchored here by a single hair. This used to be a terrible spot for yellow fever, and Sir Francis Drake died here of the scourge, after capturing and looting Caracas and other cities in Queen Elizabeth's time."

Puerto Cabello is one of the most important seaports of Venezuela. Vessels from many countries stop there, bringing in goods of all sorts and taking away cargoes of coffee and cocoa in exchange. The long warehouses of importers and exporters line the docks and not far away is the railroad running to Valencia and other points of more or less importance. The public buildings are numerous and the usual statues of Bolivar and other public characters are not lacking. From Puerto Cabello to Valencia there is a well built wagon road and this is used constantly

by traders who are too old-fashioned to use the railroad.

"You cannot hire some of the natives to get on a train," said the professor, while they were looking around the town. "They look upon the railroad as the invention of the Evil One. They are the ones who have retarded the progress of South America for centuries."

At Puerto Cabello the boys witnessed some trading which was as interesting as it was amusing. An old native had brought in some pineapples which he wished to exchange in trade for some clothing. Instead of lumping the value of his stock in trade, he valued each pineapple separately and wanted to know what it would bring in exchange. Thus he gave two pineapples for a hat, three for a pair of slippers, one for a flaming red neckerchief, one for a big brass pin holding a polished bit of glass, and ten for a pair of trousers. The latter bargain was made with difficulty, the clothier taking the trousers and laying them on his counter and the native placing one pineapple after another alongside until the clothier nodded his head to show that he was satisfied. Then the native, having two pineapples left, traded them for a small bottle of cologne.

CHAPTER XXIII

A STOP AT TRINIDAD

"OFF for the Orinoco at last! Now for some real fun and excitement Mark, aren't you glad that we have left Caracas and La Guayra behind?"

"I am Frank, and I hope the trip up the Orinoco proves all we anticipate," answered Mark, as he threw himself into a steamer chair beside his chum. "But as for excitement, I don't think we have any reason to complain. We've kept a-going pretty well since we arrived."

"So we have," put in Darry, who was close at hand, watching the last speck of land fade from sight. "But we haven't had any fun, in the shape of hunting, and I suppose that's what Frank means."

"To be sure—and fishing, too, and camping out. It's all well enough to see the cities and towns, but I want to see more—the great river and the wonderful mountains and waterfalls, and all that."

"I want to see the wild horses," came from Sam. "They tell me they have any quantity of them down

on the *llanos,* and that you can buy a horse for a dollar or two any time you want him."

"A wild horse wouldn't be of much account until he was broken," said Mark. "And in trying to break him you might break your own neck. You can be sure they are not so easy to tame as our own domestic horses."

"I want a shot at a puma or something like that," continued Darry. He had had it all planned out for a long time—how he was going to send the skin nome for a rug to place in the parlor.

They were on a British steamer bound for Port-of-Spain, on Trinidad Island, which lies off the north-east coast of Venezuela. From Port-of-Spain they expected to catch another steamer bound directly up the Orinoco to Ciudad Bolivar, the head of navigation for large steamers, especially during the dry season.

"It's a great coast," said Mark, as he gazed back, where the mountains were now lost in the distance. "There ought to be splendid chances for mining there."

"There are splendid chances," said the professor, who overheard the remark. "The mountains are full of minerals. But at present most of the mining

is done in the interior. We will visit some of the camps along the upper Orinoco."

The run to Port-of-Spain was a hot one, despite the breezes which blew, and the boys were glad enough when, one morning, the steamer turned into the Gulf of Paria, a great land-locked harbor in which a vessel can anchor anywhere with ease.

"To the westward is the eastern shore of Venezuela," said the professor, "and on the east is the island of Trinidad, which, as you all know, is a very valuable British possession. Trinidad is known all over the United States for it gives to us something which is used on the finest of our streets. Do any of you know what that is?"

"Asphalt," replied Frank. "I have heard that there is a regular lake of it on the island."

"There is, ninety-nine acres in extent, and the asphaltum flows over its banks in all directions, making natural walks which are almost as hard as stone. At the center of the lake the pitch is boiling hot and bubbles up with an odor which is far from pleasant."

"I wouldn't mind seeing the place," said Hockley.

"We may get a chance to view it from a distance. To get too close would not be pleasant. The job of getting the asphaltum out is one of the meanest on

earth. The stuff is chopped off the surface in spots where it is cold, and no matter how deep a hollow is made, nature soon fills it again. How the Pitch Lake, as it is termed, originated, has bothered scientists since its discovery."

"Do you notice the difference in the appearance of the water," remarked Sam. "It was blue before, now it is a dirty brown. Has that anything to do with that Pitch Lake?"

"No, Winthrop, the dirt you see is washed into the Gulf from the Orinoco, which has a number of mouths in this vicinity, as well as mouths emptying directly into the Atlantic."

Before nightfall they came in sight of the port and dropped anchor in the roadstead, for the harbor of Port-of-Spain is too shallow to admit the passage of large vessels. Soon a small craft came alongside and took them ashore.

"We are in an English country sure enough," declared Mark. "See how many English there are. It does one good to hear the language spoken again."

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed in the town," said Professor Strong. "It looks so beautiful from a distance. It is very dirty, and many of the houses are little better than huts. Of course the English

that are here live well enough. It is the native element that is away behind the times."

Nevertheless, the party managed to find a comfortable hotel, kept by a whole-souled son of Great Britain, who rejoiced in the name of Wellington Cunningham.

"Glad to know you," said Wellington Cunningham. "Make yourselves at 'ome. So you are bound for the upper Orinoco, eh? Take my hadvice and stay away from the bloody country. Hi know hall habout it, Hi do. Went there in '87 and halmost died of the bloody fever. Hit ain't fit for a white man. If the fever gets you you're a corpse."

"That's cheerful," was Mark's comment. "But we are not going to stay very long."

"Better not go. Hif you want to see the world visit Hold Hingland. No better country on the globe."

"No better?" queried Frank, with a wink at his chums. "What of the United States?"

"Too green, lad, too green. 'T will be hall right henough when you 'ave the age," responded Wellington Cunningham, solemnly.

"It suits us—we wouldn't want anything better," said Mark, dryly.

The hotel was crowded with people, and among the number was a Colorado gold miner named Andrew Hume, who was bound for the upper Orinoco on a prospecting expedition. The miner was both good-hearted and talkative and was soon on first-class terms with our friends.

"That Englishman makes me snicker," said Andy Hume, as he wished himself to be called. "He talks about the States, and what he don't know would fill the Colorady river basin. Asked me if the Injuns interfered with the mining, and if the miners and other folks out west wasn't afraid the bears and buffaloes would eat 'em up! When I told him I hadn't seen a bear nor a buffalo for years, and told him the only Injuns in our camp was three good-fer-nuthin scamps who laid around the saloons all day soaking firewater, he looked at me as if I was crazy. He must think Colorady and Californy are howling wildernesses."

"No doubt he does think that," said Mark. "But then, you must remember, we have some queer notions of South America and South Africa. I didn't dream that everything in Venezuela—I mean in the cities—was so up-to-date,—telephones, electric lights, street cars, and all that."

"Well, I'm with you there, lad, I didn't dream of 'em myself. And I heard of something yesterday that kind of stumped me, too. They have mines and mining machinery away up back in the country just as good as any in Colorady or Californy. Some syndicates running 'em and making millions out of 'em, too, I reckon."

It was found that Hume intended to take a steamer for Ciudad Bolivar on the following Monday, and the professor succeeded, after some difficulty, in procuring passage for his party on the same vessel. This pleased the old miner, and he said he trusted they would have a good trip and become firm friends.

Although the town of Port-of-Spain is far from beautiful, the country back of the city is all that one's heart could desire. There are fine highways running in all directions, lined with the most beautiful of tropical trees and shrubbery. Flowers grow in Trinidad in endless profusion and birds and butterflies are equally numerous, not to mention the monkeys and parrots.

"It's a Paradise in spots," observed Darry. "But only in spots. I don't think I would care to live here."

On Sunday they visited the cathedral of the city, and here heard not only an excellent sermon but like-

wise some fine music. In the afternoon they visited the botanical gardens, the pride of all Englishmen residing in Trinidad. The collection of flowers, ferns and trees were certainly remarkable and one not easily forgotten.

The boys were up bright and early Monday morning, and by nine o'clock were on the steamer, bag and baggage. At Port-of-Spain the professor had visited a number of establishments and procured such additions to their outfit as he deemed necessary.

"We will have to go well equipped," he said. "For I know but little of the towns in the interior. At the time I visited here before they amounted to but little, so far as being able to buy what one wished was concerned. They kept plenty of goods for the native trade, but those things wouldn't suit you."

"No, I'd rather stick to what I'm used to," said Sam. "It's enough to go into a strange country among a strange people, without putting up with things to wear and use with which you are unacquainted."

At Port-of-Spain the boys all received letters from home and sent long communications in return. They related all their various adventures but touched lightly upon the perils encountered.

"It's no use of scaring the folks to death," was the way in which Mark put it. "What's past is past, and let that end it."

"That's true," said Darry. "Besides, if we said too much our folks might write to us to come home on the next steamer."

The only one of the party who was at all downcast was Hockley. This youth had hoped to meet Dan Markel and get back at least some of his property. Now he felt that the chance of doing this was slipping away forever.

"By the time we get back to the coast he'll be gone for good—and nobody will know where," he said.

"Well, why don't you go back to Caracas and hunt for him," returned Frank. "We're not compelling you to go along."

"Oh, don't blow about it," cried Hockley, angrily. "I'll do what I please, without advice from you."

"The man may turn up yet," put in Mark. "I don't think he'd come to Venezuela without he had some object in so doing."

"I heard him say something about a gold mine once," said Sam. "Perhaps he thought to try his

luck in that direction—after he found he had to settle down."

"His gold mine is out of somebody else's pocket," grumbled Hockley, and walked away, amid a laugh which could not be repressed.

CHAPTER XXIV

UP THE RIVER TO BOLIVAR

THERE are several ways of entering the Orinoco proper, but the main stream is the Boca de Navios, flowing eastward into the Atlantic. This great body of water is cut into two channels, each about two miles wide, by a series of islands, some little more than marshlands and others hilly and covered with heavy tropical growths.

"The exact length of the Orinoco is not known," said the professor, in reply to a question from Mark. "It would be a difficult matter to reach its source, which is located somewhere in the Sierra Parime Mountains, thousands of feet up among the clouds. Roughly speaking the stream proper is almost two thousand miles long."

"But we can't sail that far, can we?" asked Hockley.

"By no means. Bolivar, for which we are now bound, marks the head of tide water, and there we will have to take a smaller vessel, even though the

river at that point is several miles wide and over three hundred feet deep. Bolivar is about two hundred and fifty miles from the ocean, and about half way to where the Orinoco is joined by the Apure River, in the west. From this point the Orinoco branches southward, through a country of *llanos* and immense forests, until it approaches the Sierra Parime Mountains, where it is much broken by cascades and rocky canyons. At this point there is a small stream, the Casiquiare, which connects with the Rio Negro, a large river flowing into the Amazon of Brazil.

"Are there many towns on the river?" questioned Frank.

"Towns, yes, but no cities worth mentioning. Along the upper Orinoco the inhabitants are mostly natives who raise stock and gather cocoa beans, tonqua beans—used for soaps and perfumes—and fruits. To the southward, are immense forests where rubber is found, and in the mountains are the valuable mines which we have already mentioned. Some of these mines are held to be worth ten to twenty millions of dollars each."

"Gracious! I wouldn't mind owning one of those myself," said Darry, in a low voice.

town to prove up the claim and while I was gone what did Bargess do but gather all the gold in sight and run away to Mexico with it."

"But he had to leave the mine," said Darry.

"He did, but it never paid as well as it had at the start, and I stopped working it six weeks later. I wish I could find Bargess."

"You never heard of him afterward?"

"Never a word, excepting that somebody had once seen him in Mexico at a town called La Dardado. If I should run across him I think there would be some warm work the next few minutes," added the old miner, pointedly.

The accommodations on the steamer, while not elegant, were yet sufficient for comfort, and the days passed swiftly enough to the boys. Mark and Darry were studying Spanish, for they felt that a knowledge of the language would be of great use to them. Frank and Sam also studied a little. Hockley was too lazy to occupy himself in any manner. Seeking a shady corner of the deck he would stretch out at full length and sleep from one hour's end to the next.

"He certainly believes in taking it easy," said Sam to Darry, as they happened to pass the youth.

"Of one thing you can be sure, he'll never kill himself by overwork."

"I don't suppose he'll have to, if his father is as rich as he pretends. But the heat has got something to do with his laziness. It's terrific."

"Well, we can't expect anything different for we are within seven or eight degrees of the equator. If it wasn't for the nights I don't see how any of us could stand it."

Although the river was wide, the steamer moved along the channel slowly and with caution. This was done because of the numerous bars and snags which form to impede navigation—just as they sometimes form on the Mississippi and Missouri of our own country.

"It is said that once this river country was populated by great tribes of Indians that have to-day totally disappeared," said the professor. "They were a peaceful nation, living on the fruit which abounded on every side, on the numerous fish which the river afforded, and on the small wild animals found in the forests. But soon after Columbus discovered the land, the Spaniards came over with a thirst for gold and power, and that was the end of a peace which had perhaps reigned for centuries."

"What of a pre-historic civilization here?" asked Sam.

"Some few traces have been found, but not many. The civilization was confined more directly to the western coast of the country and to Central America. But even of that the most is lost, and lost perhaps forever."

The outlook along the lower Orinoco is not inviting, and the boys soon tired of it. Either bank was lined with grass and reeds, with here and there a patch of wild brushwood, the home of birds innumerable. Pelicans were there, and wild ducks, and there was an odor of heated salt-meadow water which was at times almost overpowering. In the distance were immense forests, but so far off that nothing about them could be clearly distinguished.

"Set a fellow ashore along there and he could get lost without half trying," observed Mark. "How awfully lonesome it looks."

"Spare me from getting lost!" said Frank, with something like a shiver. "I just want to have a good time and nothing else."

To help pass the time, the professor brought out one of the guns and some ammunition and let them take turns at shooting the wild birds as they came

within reasonable distance, at the same time giving the lads several necessary lessons in aiming.

"Don't be in a hurry," he cautioned to Frank. "Be quick, but not too quick, is a good huntsman's motto. Now try your hand at the pelican yonder."

Frank took careful aim and fired, but missed his mark. Then Darry tried and the big water bird was hit in the wing, and speedily dove out of sight among the reeds.

"Please let me try at something else," pleaded Frank, and when another bird came in range the professor did so. The youth was now more careful and the bird came down like a stone. But it fell into the river and could not be secured.

The shooting lasted all of an hour and at the conclusion Professor Strong declared himself well satisfied with results. "No one is such a terribly bad shot," he said. "And a little practice will do wonders, as you will soon learn."

When the town of Bolivar was reached the boys were surprised to find it located on a bluff, sixty or seventy feet above the river level. It is a very ancient place and boasts of a fortress built by the Spaniards ages ago.

"The town is built so high up on account of the

swelling of the stream during the wet season," said Professor Strong. "When the rains are extra severe the river rises fifty and even sixty feet and often carries away large sections of plantations along its bank."

"There seems to be plenty of shipping," observed Mark. "There are ships here of a dozen nationalities."

"Bolivar is the custom-house port for the whole of the Orinoco, which accounts for all those ships being here. The territory to be covered being so vast, an immense amount of business is done, amounting to millions of dollars annually. Gold is exported in large quantities. There are a dozen factories where cigars and stogies are made."

They were soon ashore and climbing the hilly street to one of the hotels. It was a busy scene, and quite like New York, so Mark declared, on account of the various nationalities to be seen,—American and English miners, German shipping merchants, French and Italian shop and hotel keepers, and negro and other native workmen, all intermingling in the most friendly manner.

"Everybody seems to be smoking," said Darry. "Negroes, priests, women and all. I never dreamed

of such a sight. And some of those workmen haven't clothing enough to be decent," he added, in some disgust.

By inquiries at a shipping office it was learned that no steamer for up the river could be had until two days later. This would give them a chance to inspect the city buildings, the parks, and other points of interest.

CHAPTER XXV

SOMETHING ABOUT COCOA AND CHOCOLATE

"BEFORE we go any further up the river I wish you boys to visit a cocoa plantation and learn something about cocoa and chocolate," said the professor on the following morning. "There is a large plantation not many miles from here, and we will take a drive to it in a carriage immediately after breakfast."

At this announcement all were pleased but Hockley, who drew down the corners of his mouth in disapproval.

"It will be dead slow," he muttered. "I'd rather see the sights in the town."

"We will view those later," replied the professor. He had no intention of leaving the tall youth behind again, and Hockley realized it and made no further remonstrance.

The plantation was a large affair, situated upon a small creek flowing into the Orinoco. It was

owned by a German merchant doing business in Bolivar, and it was the merchant himself who showed them around the place.

"As you can see," said Professor Strong, when they were walking around, "the cocoa is set out very much as is coffee. The seeds are planted in a seed-bed and kept there two or three months. Then the shoots are planted in the field, between shade trees, with ditches cut through the field for irrigating purposes. The trees begin to bear in about five years and with care will last for thirty-five to forty years."

"But where does the chocolate come in?" interrupted Hockley.

"Chocolate is made from the seed of the cocoa pod, so called. This pod, as you can see, is about the shape of a cantelope, and when ripe, is reddish in color. Each pod contains fifty or seventy-five seeds, each the size of one's thumb nail. The trees give two crops a year, one in June and the other in December."

"Do they use the beans as they are?" came from Sam.

"No. After the pods are gathered they are placed in the sun to dry. As soon as they burst

open the beans are shelled out and sorted. Some growers then bag them and sell them in that shape, but others declare that the best cocoa is produced by placing the beans in the ground until they are about half rotted. Cocoa, such as we drink at home, is made by breaking the beans up, or shaving them fine, and then boiling in water or milk, and serving with sugar. Chocolate is made by mixing the crushed up beans with sugar and with some spices, to give it a special flavor. Of course you all know cake chocolate and chocolate bonbons. Cake chocolate unsweetened is generally cocoa beans ground up and mixed with flour or other foreign substances to give it weight. Sweet chocolate cakes have sugar, honey and very often some spices in them. Bonbons are made of cocoa, sugar, flavoring extracts and anything else the wide awake confectioner chooses to put into them to strike the palate of his customer. Cocoa and chocolate, if pure, are very nourishing, and have none of the bad effects on the system that are attributed to coffee."

"What is cacao?" asked Frank.

"That is only another name for cocoa, Newton. Cocoa often grows in a wild state, but the beans are not as large as when cultivated. In some districts,

where money is scarce, cocoa beans are used instead in buying and selling. A native will gather all the beans he can in a little bag and then come into town and barter them for whatever he wants—and there was a time when he could pay his taxes in beans."

"Well, that isn't so very strange," put in Darry. "In revolutionary times in our own country, they used to pay taxes and other demands in corn and grain."

"Yes, and they pay taxes now, in country places, by working on the public highways," added Frank.

The walk around the cocoa plantation proved full of interest, and when it was concluded and they had taken some of the bitter-sweet beans from a tree as souvenirs the proprietor of the place invited them to lunch in his summer-house, an affair built in true German style under the wide spreading branches of a royal palm.

"In my *gartenlaube* you shall drink chocolate that is chocolate," said their host. "Not the chocolate you often get at home, adulterated with pipe-clay or something like that, but that which is made from the pure bean mixed with the cleanest of sugar."

He was as good as his word, and with the creamy chocolate came German coffee-cake equally good.

All of the boys drank the chocolate eagerly, and Frank could not help but smack his lips over it.

"I never tasted anything better," he declared. "If I could get it as good at home I'd never touch coffee again," and Mark said the same.

Their host was a talkative man, and wished to know all about their proposed trip up the river.

"You will see many interesting sights," he said. "I have been up twice—four years ago and two years ago. The last time I went up the natives were having a bitter quarrel among themselves and I had all I could do to keep out of trouble. But generally they are very friendly and will do anything for you if you pay them fair wages."

On returning to the city they met Andy Hume, who had been interviewing a number of miners who had just come in from one of the mining districts.

"They've struck two new mines," he said, "and both good payers. I pumped 'em pretty thoroughly and I think I can strike something good if I go right at it. I wish the boat sailed to-day instead of to-morrow."

"You'll have to be patient," said Professor Strong, with a smile. "I fancy you will find plenty of unexplored territory when you get there."

With so many things to look at the time slipped by quickly. An hour was spent the next day at one of the cigar factories, where the boys watched the workmen roll cigars and pack them in boxes. But the smell was so strong that Frank and Sam came away more than half sick.

"I can't imagine how they can stand it to work in such a place," said Frank. "It's enough to sicken a dog."

"It is what they get used to," said Mark. "But I must say I didn't like it myself."

At last came the time to bid adieu to Bolivar, which in former days was called Angostura. They went aboard the little paddle-box steamer loaded with bundles, for they had left their trunks at the hotel, to remain there until their return.

"I suppose that's the last of civilization," remarked Frank. "Now for the forests and a good time hunting, fishing, and camping out."

"You mustn't be quite so fast," said the professor, with a laugh. "It will be at least a week before we reach any place for hunting and fishing. Of course we could stop off on the way, but I take it you boys wish to get right into the mountains."

"So we do," came from several of the others.

"This boat will make a number of stops first—at Muitogo, at Altagracia, at Caicara, where the river Apure joins the Orinoco, and at points of lesser importance, until we reach the Meta River, which runs into Colombia. At that point we will disembark and hire a native boat to take us up into the mountains as far as we care to go, past the Falls of Atures and into a region which is even to-day but little known to the outside world."

"And how many miles shall we sail to get to the mountains?" asked Darry.

"About six hundred from here."

"And after that how far shall we go?" questioned Hockley.

"As far as we please. You all wish to see what a tropical jungle is like, and wish to hunt and fish, and I am going to do my best to accommodate you. If all goes well, we will have some excellent sport between now and the time we return," concluded Professor Strong.

To the boys, impatient to get into the forests, the time on the side-wheeler went but slowly. Day after day was spent on deck, gazing at the vast plains on one side of the river and the forest on the other. They made the stops mentioned, and also several

others, but none of the party went ashore, for the heat was terrific.

"We can't get out of this too quick for me," said Hockley. "I feel about half fried out already."

"The climate changes as one nears the mountains," returned the professor. "You won't suffer so much in a few days," and his words proved true. As they came in sight of the first of the mountains—really the foothills of the Andes—the thermometer dropped half a dozen degrees and the nights proved all that could be desired.

CHAPTER XXVI

CAMPING ON THE UPPER ORINOCO

"WHAT a truly grand sight!"

It was Mark who uttered the words. He stood in the bow of a long canoe, manned by a single Indian, who was sending the craft along the bosom of the silent river with skill and swiftness.

On each side of the canoe the dark waters of the upper Orinoco stretched to a distance of a hundred yards or more. Beyond were gigantic forests of mahogany, rose-wood, grenadilla, ebony, and rubber trees. Beneath the trees were immense ferns and strange varicolored mosses, and over and through all grew the ever-present tropical vines, forming meshes which were well-nigh impassable.

The sun shone far to the westward, but the river lay in a deep shadow, and the many birds which had sung so gaily during the day had ceased their song, giving place to the sounds of the oncoming night. Far in the distance some wild parrots screeched out boldly, and many monkeys added a chorus of their

own. As Mark gazed at a tree which stood at the bend of the stream he saw something uncurl itself and drop into the water with a slight splash.

"What was that?" he asked of the professor, who was nearest to him.

"That was a water-snake, Robertson. An ugly creature, too, if you meet him in his native element."

"Ugh, a snake! Then I guess we won't land there."

"The Indian says he knows of a nice spot a mile beyond here, where there is a cleared place on the brow of a little bluff. To camp in the midst of such a jungle as this would be very unwise."

For three days the party had been traveling along the upper Orinoco in the canoe, which was a stout affair, over twenty feet long and with a little hood in the stern for protection from the sun. The last village at which they had stopped had been left ten miles behind and here they had bidden adieu to Andy Hume, who was in another boat and who wished to explore one of the many tributaries of the Orinoco which join the mighty stream at this point.

The trip in the canoe had been full of interest. They passed several rapids, and at one point had had to "tote" the canoe and its contents around a

picturesque waterfall. They had gone fishing under the directions of the Indian, whose name was Cubara, and had brought in a fine mess, which had been cooked over the camp-fire in true hunter fashion. They had even gone hunting and each of the boys had brought down several tropical birds of gorgeous plumage. They had wanted to go swimming, but this the professor had not allowed, fearing there might be something in the water to harm them.

The Indian was a knowing fellow and bright, although not given to much talking. He had been selected by the professor because of his knowledge of English, which was, however, slight. He took particularly to Frank, who had given him a pocket looking-glass he chanced to have with him.

"Well I wish we were landed," grumbled Hockley, who sat under the hood of the canoe, taking it easy. "I am tired of this everlasting water. There is a sameness that is perfectly sickening."

"That's because you don't enjoy the beauties of nature," returned Darry, with a grin. "You haven't the poetic temperament, so to speak."

"You needn't poke fun at me," growled the lank youth, with a scowl. "I say there is sameness,

and there is. It's been nothing but water and trees ever since we started."

"If I were you, Hockley, I'd get out and wade back," put in Frank. "I can't imagine what made you come."

"I came to have a good time, but it's no good time drifting in a canoe like this," was the surly response. "If we were ashore—"

"We'll soon be ashore," interrupted Mark. "There is the bluff, just around the bend. Cubara is right, it's an ideal spot for camping out."

"If there isn't a puma there waiting to chew us up," added Frank, but the smile on his face showed that he was not particularly afraid.

The canoe was run in among the bushes lining the bank below the bluff, and leaping ashore the Indian pulled the craft well out of the water. Then one after another leaped to the dry ground beyond.

"Leave the baggage where it is for the present," said the professor. "I want to take a look around before I decide to pitch camp. There may be some objection which Cubara has overlooked."

But there was none, and soon they had everything ashore and up to the edge of the bluff, which arose

from the surrounding jungle to a height of thirty feet. To one side of the bluff was a series of rough rocks leading down to the river and on the other was a beautiful waterfall coming from a mountain a mile or more to the eastward. On the other side of the Orinoco the virgin forests stretched for miles.

As in all tropical localities night came on swiftly, and by the time they had brought all their things to the top of the bluff and started a camp-fire darkness was upon them, lit up only by a few bright stars far overhead. They had brought with them a fair sized tent and Sam and Darry were soon hard at work cutting the necessary poles for erecting the shelter.

"These forests look as if they had never seen the axe of a woodsman," said Sam. "What immense trees! Some of them must be two hundred feet high."

The poles were soon cut and then the erection of the tent began. It was placed at a point where the ground sloped a little, which would allow the water to run off in case it rained. It was fastened down with extra heavy stakes so that nothing short of a hurricane would be able to level it.

The tent erected, they took the most valuable of their stores inside, piling them up at the rear. There

was a case for their guns, another containing ammunition, and a third medicines, and also several bundles of clothing. They had also brought with them a number of canned goods, coffee, sugar, salt and some jerked beef, in case they should be unable to bring down their own meat. The jerked beef had been purchased at Apure, where there is a large market for beef, both "on the hoof" and prepared. Among the stores were also a bag of flour and a small bag of beans—the latter brought along by Sam, who declared that he was going to have his usual Sunday morning delicacy, no matter what happened.

It was decided by the professor that throughout their stay in the jungle each should take his turn at watching during the night. "There are seven of us all told," he said. "And that will give each only about an hour apiece, which will be no hardship. Perhaps nothing will come to disturb us, but with one on guard all the others will be able to sleep in comfort."

The first night in the camp passed without anything unusual occurring. The boys were up bright and early, and Mark discovered a pool at the foot of the waterfall where they might bathe and wash

to their hearts' content. The water was as cool as it was pure and refreshed them wonderfully.

"Makes a fellow feel like living again," cried Darry, as he splashed around. "I presume that water comes from the very top of yonder mountain."

"No doubt of it," returned Mark, "and some of it may be melted snow for all we know."

Hockley had been too lazy to take a bath, and still lay on the flooring of the tent, snoring lustily. To wake him up, Darry went and pulled him by the foot.

"Hi, you, let go!" cried the sleepy youth, as he sat up. "Can't you let me sleep?"

"Time for breakfast," returned Darry. "We've had a bath."

"Have you? Well, I'm not so dirty as all that. After this you let me sleep as long as I please."

"All right," returned Darry, coolly. And as he turned away he added, in an undertone to Frank: "What a perfect bear he is! I wish he had remained at home."

"So do I," was the answer. "But as he is with us we'll have to make the best of it."

While the others were getting breakfast Hockley began leisurely to dress himself. He had pulled on

"Take it off! take it off!"

one shoe and was holding the other when of a sudden he gave a cry of terror and leaped up wildly.

"Take it off! Take it off!"

"What is it?" demanded the professor, quickly, and rushed to his side.

"I don't know what it is. It crawled out of my shoe. Take it off!"

He pointed to a creature four or five inches long, with many legs and with horned jaws, which rested on his knee, shaking its tiny head from one side to the other.

"A centipede!" murmured Professor Strong, and doubling up his finger he snapped the thing to the ground and there quickly stamped on it.

"A centipede!" bawled Hockley. "They're poisonous, so I've heard. I—I think he bit me in the back of the hand. Do you think that if he did it will prove fa-fatal?" And he turned pale.

"I don't think so, Hockley. Let me see your hand."

"Yes, sir. But hadn't we better get out of here? There may be more around?"

"We might go where there are more instead of less. Venezuela is full of centipedes, and some of them are dangerous. But that wasn't such a big

fellow, and your hand seems to be all right. They won't bite a human being unless they are pushed to it, and some natives do not mind the bites at all."

"No hurt me," put in Cubara, with a smile. "Some of my people eat dem—no poison much, no," and he shook his head vigorously.

"I don't want any more of them," growled Hockley. "What a nasty looking thing—with so many legs!"

"You always want to shake out everything you wear before you put it on," said the professor, to all of the boys. "If you don't you may encounter scorpions and tarantulas as well as centipedes. They are the great drawbacks to almost every hot country."

CHAPTER XXVII

BRINGING DOWN AN OCELOT

THE centipede scare had been almost too much for Hockley, and he hardly ate a mouthful of the breakfast which the others prepared.

"It's a nasty country—I'm sorry I came here," he told Mark. "I expected a better time."

"Well you are here and that's the end of it," was the simple answer. "But perhaps things won't be so bad after we get used to it."

"I thought it would be like hunting in the mountains of Pennsylvania. I once went out there and had a fine time, bringing down small game and fishing for trout. But that awfully big jungle—" Hockley did not finish, but his look of fear was more impressive than words.

However, the breakfast passed off pleasantly enough and inside of an hour all the boys were at the river bank, baiting their hooks under the direction of Cubara, who told them that he had once made his living as a fisherman.

"I catch de fish in de mountains," he said. "Sell dem to de gold miners. Da no take time to fish, so pay big price."

"I suppose the miners don't care to do anything but hunt for gold," remarked Frank.

"Hunt, hunt, hunt, night an' day," was the answer. "Some go 'way up de big mountains, stay dare many, many moons, come back, no gold, all crazy."

"Crazy!"

"Yes, crazy, stay alone so long, no want dat to fish for him. He crazy, maybe he kill!" And Cubara shrugged his bony shoulders.

"That's a cheerful outlook for Andy Hume," murmured Mark. "I sincerely hope he doesn't go crazy through loneliness."

"I have heard of such cases in our own country," put in the professor. "Some miners went crazy during the gold fever in California, and only a few months ago I was reading in the newspapers of a prospector in Alaska who had gone insane through having lost himself in the mountains. It is no child's play—this trying to make nature yield up her secrets."

Fishing lasted all of the morning, and by noon

they had twenty-odd specimens of the finny tribe in a pool of fresh water among the rocks. Most of the catch were of the perch variety, although somewhat different from the class usually found in our own streams.

"Haven't run across any of those wonderful electric eels," said Hockley. "I thought we'd be sure to be shocked to death," he added, with a sniff.

"Electric eels not here," said Cubara. "Take you to dem udder day maybe."

"I want to go hunting first," put in Sam. He was longing to shoot something big.

"We'll go hunting this afternoon," said the professor.

"I don't care to go hunting," said Hockley. "I'd rather take it easy to-day."

"Very well, then, you may remain in camp with Cubara, Hockley."

The dinner was rather a hasty one, and a short while later Professor Strong and four of the boys set out. Each was armed with a rifle or shotgun, and each carried some food for supper, should they not return until late.

The professor had had a long talk with the Indian regarding the game in the vicinity, and Cubara had

told him where they were likely to find a number of peccaries, a wild animal common to many parts of Venezuela and one much sought after by the natives for food. The peccary is not unlike a wild hog in general appearance, and when full grown weighs from fifty to sixty pounds. They are very fierce when attacked and have short tusks which are as sharp as daggers.

The way was up the mountain side behind the camp, over tall rocks and around spots where the undergrowth was absolutely impenetrable. Overhead the sun shone down from a cloudless sky, yet under the gigantic trees not a ray was to be found, so thick was the foliage.

As they advanced the constant screeching of green parrots reached their ears, mingled with the distant pandemonium created by a tribe of howling monkeys.

"What a noise they make," cried Darry. "I never heard such a racket in my life."

"Those monkeys are the genuine ring-tail howling monkeys," laughed the professor. "They are the pest of a hunter's camp. When once they make up their mind to serenade you at night nothing short of a hurricane can stop them. Their howl, heard

in the darkness, is the most mournful sound on earth, ten times worse than that of a dog baying at the moon."

"Are they dangerous?" asked Sam.

"Not generally speaking, although you want to be careful of what you do to them. A shot from a gun will sometimes scatter them for an hour or so. But if you pick up a stone and hurl it at them, they will surely pick up other stones to hurl at you in return."

In two hours they had covered a distance of several miles. Nothing had been seen of peccaries, and somewhat disheartened they came to a halt near the bank of a mountain torrent which, at that point, formed a pool several rods in extent.

"Hush!" said the professor suddenly. "Get down behind the bushes. There is a fine shot for all of us."

They dropped down, and then gazed in the direction he pointed out. Sitting on some tall bushes overhanging the opposite side of the pool were a number of birds almost as large as wild turkeys. They were bluish in color, with a greenish tinge under the throat fading to white. On the head of each was a crest of yellow which looked like gold.

"What beauties!" murmured Sam.

"Ready, all of you," came from the professor. "Take aim. Fire!"

The word was not yet out of his mouth when the birds became alarmed and started to rise. But at the volley two dropped into the water dead while two others fluttered helplessly among the trees. The professor and Mark ran after the latter and after some trouble put them to death and brought them in. In the meantime those in the pool were also secured.

"These birds are crested curassows, or hoccos," said the professor. "Some of them are the color of those we have shot but the majority are black. They are very numerous in Venezuela, Guiana, and Brazil, and a great many people keep them as we do tame turkeys, and the meat is very much the same."

"Hurrah for the turkey meat!" exclaimed Frank. "That will be a change from our fish diet."

With the curassows slung over their backs they proceeded on their way, around the pool and up the mountain torrent, to where there was a small stretch of table-land. From this point they could obtain a clear view of the surrounding country for many miles.

"There is the Orinoco," said Mark, pointing to the stream as it glistened in the sunlight. "But the hill is between us and our camp."

On the table-land they brought down a score of birds, including a trogon, a beautiful creature of black, green and gold, with long, sweeping tail; a pair of birds of the sparrow-hawk variety; and several humming-birds.

"These humming birds are called the ruby and topaz," said Professor Strong. "They are hunted down by the thousands each year and are used in the decoration, principally, of ladies' hats."

"They are certainly pretty," said Sam. "But what a shame to slaughter them in such a wholesale fashion."

"All sorts of tropical birds are slaughtered merely for the purposes of the milliner," went on the professor. "It is certainly a shame, but so long as the ladies demand feathers on their hats the slaughter will probably continue."

Leaving the table-land they plunged again into the forest. The professor had found tracks which he felt certain belonged to some wild animals, and as they advanced each held his gun ready for use should the occasion require.

The occasion was not long in coming. Directly in front of them was a fallen tree, a veritable monarch of the forest, all of nine feet in diameter and with branches spreading in all directions. As they were making their way around the roots of this tree they heard a low snarl of rage and saw a wild beast not unlike a huge cat leap from the roots with another wild beast in its mouth.

Crack! went the professor's rifle and the bullet hit the beast in the forepaw. At once it dropped its prey—an armadillo—and faced around with another snarl of rage more fierce than ever.

"He's coming for us!" yelled Mark, and fired his own gun. But his aim was not true and the bullet merely grazed the beast's tail.

By this time the ocelot—for such the animal proved to be—was up on the tree trunk, glaring directly down upon them. He was closer to Frank than to anyone else, and it looked as if he would leap upon the youth without further delay.

It must be confessed that Frank was badly frightened. But he did not lose his total presence of mind, and almost mechanically he lifted the shotgun he carried and blazed away. At the same time Sam and Darry fired, and between the three the

ocelot was mortally wounded and rolled to the ground, growling and snarling in a fashion fearful to contemplate. Then the professor rushed in and with a shot at short range finished the beast.

"Say, but that was a close call all around," came from Mark, when the excitement was over.

"That's what it was," returned Frank, breathing heavily. "I don't want to get in such close quarters again. I thought sure he was going to nab me."

The professor was much vexed that his first shot had not killed the ocelot. "I must be getting rusty in my shooting," he said.

The armadillo was limping away on three legs, for the ocelot had bitten it severely through the hind quarters. But before it could get very far, Darry and Sam went after it and brought it low. Then they dragged it back by its tail and laid it beside the larger beast.

The ocelot was a beautiful specimen, measuring four feet from nose to tip of tail. It was of a greyish fawn color, with stripes and patches of black. The eyes were yellowish brown, full and round. The boys could well imagine how they might glitter in the darkness of night.

"This creature belongs to the leopard family," said the professor, while reloading his rifle. "They are very powerful, and frequently attack animals twice their size. There are a number of varieties, and some go by the common name of tiger cats. The skins are very valuable for rugs and other purposes."

"What about the meat?" questioned Darry.

"The natives eat the meat of almost every wild beast. Personally I have never tried ocelot steaks, although I have been told they are fairly good eating."

CHAPTER XXVIII

MONKEYS AND A CANOE

After the bringing down of the ocelot several days passed without anything unusual happening. The boys went hunting and fishing to their heart's content and brought down many small animals, but nothing of great importance outside of a pair of peccaries, which were found in a hollow tree by Sam and brought down by him and Darry. The peccary proved to be sweet eating, and Cubara was particularly pleased to get the meat.

"Werry nice him," he said. "Love him werry much. Eat him ev'ry day fo' many, many moons."

"Perhaps you could," answered Darry. "But I'd get mighty sick of it in a couple of days."

Frank and Mark had been planning to go hunting on their own account, further up the river, and at last obtained the professor's permission to use the canoe for that purpose.

"But you must be very careful, boys," said Pro-

fessor Strong. "Do not go ashore unless you are sure of your ground, and come back before sunset."

"We'll remember," said Frank. "We only want to go along the river bank for a mile or two."

In coming up to the camp both Frank and Mark had taken instructions from Cubara concerning the handling of the canoe, so they had no difficulty in embarking and paddling up the river, which so far as eye could reach was as smooth as a mill-pond excepting where the mountain torrent ran into it over the bluff.

"If only we can bring down a puma or something like that," said Frank, as they left the camp behind. "Won't the others be envious!"

"We'd have our hands full with a puma I'm thinking," returned Mark. "Why they are just like the panthers of our own country. We had better try for something smaller first."

The camp was soon out of sight, around a turn of the stream, and then they pulled in close to shore, to see if they could find any trace of something worth shooting.

"This is slow," remarked Mark, after a long silence, during which they had paddled the best part of

a mile. "I haven't seen a single thing worth mentioning."

"Nor I. I have half a mind to throw a line overboard and go fishing," replied Frank.

"All right, do so, and I'll paddle for awhile."

The line was baited and thrown into the water. Scarcely had it sunk a yard when there came a nibble and a pull which almost caused Frank to go overboard.

"I've got something big now!" gasped Frank, holding on to the line with one hand and the canoe seat with the other.

"What is it?" questioned Mark, quickly.

"I don't know, but it pulls like a whale."

"Let me help you," continued Mark, and dropped the paddle on the bottom of the canoe. Then both tried to haul in the line, but before they could do so there was a swish in the water and a big, black object appeared for a moment, a black object with a greenish head and sharp greenish eyes. At this both lads fell back in dismay.

"A water snake!" cried Mark. "And a big one, too. Better cut him loose."

The canoe was now spinning up the stream, dragged by the snake who showed his head with the

fishhook caught in one side close to the eye. That the reptile was angry and ready to fight there could be no doubt.

As quickly as he could Frank brought out his knife and sawed away at the line. As it parted the snake came up again, lifting his head into the canoe and hissing viciously. Then he glided along the side of the craft, bent upon attacking Frank.

Mark had his gun handy and quick as a flash he caught up the weapon. Bang! went the gun, and the water snake caught the charge full in the face. With a wild flapping he arose in the air, whipped his slimy body across Frank's leg and sank out of sight into the river.

For the moment the boys gazed after the reptile in a horror that no words can express. Frank had sunk on the seat trembling in every joint and Mark was equally affected.

"Is he—he dead?" came at last from the younger youth.

"Guess he is," answered Mark, in a hoarse voice. "Anyway he's gone, and so is the fishing line."

"I don't care about the line, Mark. Wasn't he awful?"

"That's what he was, Frank—the nastiest thing I ever saw in my life."

"That settles fishing for me. I wouldn't want to catch another water snake for a million dollars!"

It was fully five minutes before they continued on their way, and then they did so quietly, as if afraid a noise might bring the reptile after them again. But the snake failed to re-appear and soon they were a mile or more away from the spot.

Just before encountering the snake they had noticed a tribe of monkeys on the shore, watching them intently. The monkeys had followed them for a short distance but had dropped out of sight as soon as the water snake appeared.

"There come the monkeys again," said Mark, presently, and he was right. With a strange shrieking and howling they pushed some brushwood aside and came close to the water's edge, where they squatted in a long row, eyeing the canoe in a wondering manner and occasionally reaching out a paw as if beckoning the craft to come closer.

"No, thank you," said Frank, mockingly. "We don't care to trust ourselves in your hands."

As they pushed up the river the monkeys followed

them, still howling, sometimes singly and then in a deafening chorus.

"There is this much about it," said Frank, as he gazed at the creatures, which numbered fully a hundred. "I don't want to land while they are around."

"Nor I," answered his chum. "But we've got to land soon, or else go back. We're at least six or seven miles from camp now, and that's far enough."

"Supposing I give them a shot?"

"All right, blaze away, but don't hurt too many of them."

The shotgun was discharged and one monkey was killed and several wounded. Instantly the others set up a fearful screeching and fled in dismay, through the jungle, until their howling was lost in the distance.

Pushing up the river a little further, the two boys landed and pulled their craft partly out of the water. They looked around cautiously but the only living creatures that appeared were a few birds and they kept at a safe distance.

"There seems to be a sort of open trail to the northward," said Mark. "Supposing we follow that? I haven't any fancy for the jungle itself."

Frank was willing, and soon they were tramping

the trail, which led up a hill and around a series of rocks overgrown with gigantic ferns and vines.

"What a peculiar smell," said Mark, after they had passed the rocks. "Smells for all the world like the root beer we drink at home."

"I know what it is," answered his chum. "It's a sassafras grove we are entering. The professor was telling me of them. They are common here and so are other barks that druggists use."

A little while later they sighted several small animals, not unlike hares, which crossed their pathway so rapidly that they could not get a shot at the creatures. Then they came to a flock of curassows and by skillful maneuvering got so close that they brought down three before the birds knew enough to take to flight.

"Anyway we've got something for our trouble," said Frank. "I was beginning to think we'd have to go back empty-handed. If we—— What's that?"

The youth broke off short and looked inquiringly at his chum. From a distance had come a peculiar roar, not unlike that of a lion or tiger.

"Perhaps it's a puma," said Mark. "Hark! It's coming closer!"

They listened once more, and as the sound was repeated, each drew up his gun in readiness to fire. Then they heard a savage snarl, followed by a screeching and yelping.

"Two wild animals fighting," said Frank. "My how they must be chewing each other up!"

They continued to listen and gradually the sounds became fainter and fainter. Then came a final roar and all became quiet.

"One of them has been killed," said Mark.

"Yes, and the roaring beast is the victor," answered Frank. "Shall we go ahead and try to find out what it is?"

"I'd like to know what it is, but I don't want to run any risk. If it's a lion—"

"There are no lions here, Frank. But it may be a jaguar, and they are almost as dangerous."

"In that case we had better be careful. We don't want to be chewed up. Let us rest here in the open for a bit and see if he comes this way."

This was agreed to, and sitting on a rock they waited, each with his gun ready for use. Quarter of an hour slipped by, which seemed much longer to both boys. Then came a howling from the direction of the river.

"Those rascally monkeys are coming back!" exclaimed Mark. "I hope they don't come this way. We might have lots of trouble with them if they got to throwing stones at us."

"Oh, we can give them a shot or two if they do that."

"They seem to be having quite a time of it along the river. By ginger! do you think they'd bother our canoe?"

"Perhaps so! Let's go down and see if the boat is safe!"

Much alarmed the two boys caught up the birds they had shot and started down the hill on the back trail. The road was plain so there was no danger of getting lost. Mark ran ahead and was the first to catch sight of the Orinoco at the spot where they had left their craft.

The sight that met his gaze filled him with dismay. The shore was lined with howling monkeys who filled the air with their noise. Out in the stream were a score of the creatures on the canoe, howling with equal vigor. The paddles to the craft had been dropped overboard and the canoe was floating at the mercy of the wind and current.

CHAPTER XXIX

LOST ON THE ORINOCO

"WELL did you ever see such impudent beggars!" cried Mark, as Frank reached his side. "If they haven't gone and taken possession of our canoe!"

"O Mark, we must get it back somehow!" ejaculated Frank, aghast. "If we don't, how will we ever get back to camp?"

"Of course we must get it back. But how to do it I don't know. Come, let us run down the stream a bit and try to head them off."

Frank was willing enough to do anything which might give them back the canoe and away they started, as close to the bank of the stream as the jungle permitted.

But the way was dark and uncertain, for the sun was now hanging over the forest to the westward, and they had not gone far when Frank went into a boggy hole up to his knees. As he sank his gun went off, the charge luckily passing upward through the tree branches.

"What's up?" called Mark, who had gone ahead by a somewhat different route.

"I'm in a hole! Help me out!"

"I will!"

Mark was soon at his chum's side and Frank was helped from the hole without much difficulty. But his going down had disturbed a number of ugly looking spiders and one of these bit him on the hand before he could brush the creature away.

"Ough!" cried the boy, for the pain was intense.

"Did it bite you?"

"Yes."

"Too bad! But come on, or those monkeys and the canoe will be gone."

For the moment the bite of the spider, though smarting hotly, was forgotten and side by side they continued along the watercourse until they reached an inlet. Close to the river this inlet was all of fifty feet across and they had to make a long detour in order to avoid the many bog holes with which it was surrounded. All this took time and when they reached the Orinoco again the canoe with its load of monkeys was nowhere to be seen.

"It's gone!" burst out Mark. "I can't see the canoe anywhere."

"Perhaps they are already around the bend," suggested Frank. "Let us try for a short cut. It's our only chance."

As he spoke he kept whipping his hand in the air, showing the pain he was suffering. Already the skin around the bite was beginning to swell.

"It's too bad, Frank," said Mark, sympathetically. "Put some soft mud on it. I've heard that is good for bee and spider bites," and his chum did as suggested. This lessened the pain but the swelling steadily continued.

On they went through the jungle, keeping close together, for here it was darker than ever. Both thought they knew the course they were pursuing and that they would regain the stream at a point half a mile below where they had left it. They made no allowance for the fact that it is the easiest thing in the world to become completely turned around in any dense mass of growth where one has to turn this way and that in order to make progress of any sort. Old hunters are often bothered even in woods which they think they know thoroughly.

A half mile was covered when both came to a halt in dismay. Instead of sighting the Orinoco they

found before them a cliff of rocks twenty to thirty feet in height.

"Hullo, we've made a mistake!" burst out Mark.

"The river can't be in this direction," answered Frank. "We have got turned around somehow."

"Well, the river ought to be on our right."

"So it had. Let us turn in that direction."

Again they went on, fairly tearing their course through the entangling vines and over the rough roots of trees, sprawling in all directions.

"I—I can't go much further," panted Frank. "I —I'm out of wind."

"I'm pretty well blown myself," was the reply. "But we ought to be close to the river. Shall I go ahead and look?"

"No! no! don't leave me!"

Frank moved on again, tired as he was, and thus several rods more were covered.

"Water! The river!" cried Mark, and made a wild dash forward. But alas! it was not the Orinoco at all, only a long and shallow pool having apparently no outlet. Around the pool were a big flock of birds of every color imaginable. but the boys never thought to fire into the game.

"We are on the wrong tack again!" groaned Mark. "I don't believe the river is anywhere near here."

"Oh, Mark, if that is so, we are lost!"

Lost! It was a horrifying word. Were they really lost in that immense jungle, perhaps miles away from where they had left their companions? The face of each whitened and Frank sank down on a tree root in despair.

"Yes, we must be lost!" he murmured. "And if we are, how will we ever find our way back to camp?"

"We must find our way back—we simply must!" was Mark's reply. "The river can't be so very far off."

"But the canoe is gone. We won't get that back. It must be miles from here by this time," insisted Frank.

"Well, if it's gone we'll have to tramp back, that's all, Frank. I know it's a long way, and not a very inviting way either, but there is nothing else to do."

The sun was now setting and the blackness of night began to creep swiftly over the immense forest. Still further alarmed, they pushed on until, without

warning, Frank fell headlong and lay like a log. Mark raised him up and saw that the hand which had been bitten by the spider was swollen to twice its size and that the swelling was beginning to creep up the arm.

"He is poisoned, that's all there is to that," thought Mark. "Perhaps it will kill him."

The thought of his chum dying there, on his hands, in that lonely place, made him frantic. He tore off the handkerchief Frank had placed on his hand and brushed the soft mud from the bite. He had heard how poison can sometimes be sucked from a wound and now he set to work fearlessly, not thinking of himself, but only praying mentally that the action would restore Frank to consciousness.

The hours of the night to follow were such that Mark, if he lives a hundred years, will never forget. After sucking the bite thoroughly, he plastered it with fresh mud and bound it up again. Then, carrying Frank to the edge of the pool, he lit a camp-fire, to keep off any wild beasts that might be prowling in the vicinity. He bathed his chum's face and raised him up. At first Frank did not respond to this treatment but at last he opened his eyes and stared around in bewilderment.

"Frank! Frank! wake up!" cried Mark "Please try to rouse yourself."

"Wha—what happened to me?" was the uncertain question.

"You fell unconscious, don't you remember? I guess it was the spider bite did it. Please rouse up." And as Frank tried to settle back once more Mark shook him vigorously.

It was all of two hours before Frank roused up sufficiently to stand on his feet. His eyes were much swollen and he felt sick at his stomach. But the poison had now spent its force and from that time on he grew gradually better. But the swelling of his hand remained for several days.

The night passed without sleep on Mark's part, for he was afraid to leave off watching Frank. To pass the early morning hours, Mark dressed one of the curassows, covered it with mud, as he had been taught by Cubara, and placed it in the hot ashes of the fire to bake. By the time the sun came up the bird was done and to Mark it proved delicious eating, although Frank declared he could taste nothing on account of the poison still in his system.

"I'm as weak as a rag," declared the younger

boy. "When I stand up my legs fairly tremble under me."

"Then we had better not attempt to do too much to-day," answered Mark, trying to speak cheerfully.

"But we must get back to camp, Mark. What will they think of our absence?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But getting back will not be so easy. Remember, we must first locate the river."

"We ought to be able to do that by the position of the sun."

"I thought of that. But I'd rather climb up one of these big trees and take a look around."

"All right,—if you can get up." Frank gazed along the trunk of one of the monsters. "It will be no easy task."

"The vines will aid me," answered Mark, and made his preparations to ascend the tree without further delay.

As Frank had said, it was no easy task, and it was fully quarter of an hour before Mark was half way to the top of the giant of the jungle.

"Can you see anything?" called up Frank.

"Not yet, but I am getting on a level with the

trees around this one," was the reply. Mark continued to climb. It was now easier work, for at the top of the tree the branches were closer together than they were below.

"Hurrah! the river!" came the cry. "Frank, we are not so far away from it after all."

"In what direction?" demanded the younger boy.

"To the northward. We have become badly turned around I can tell you."

"Do you see anything of the camp?"

"No, that is too far off. But if we can only get to the river bank we'll be sure to strike the camp sooner or later," went on Mark. I'll come down as soon——"

Mark broke off short, as a peculiar noise just below him caught his ear. Looking down he saw a strange looking creature sitting on a branch, gazing fiercely at him, a creature covered with black and white quills and with a scaly tail that wound itself several times around the branch behind it. The animal was a coendoo, commonly called a South American porcupine.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE DEPTHS OF THE JUNGLE

ORDINARILY the South American porcupine or coendoo is a timid animal, seeking cover by day and hunting its food during the night. It lives upon nuts, roots, herbs and leaves and, unlike other porcupines which burrow in the ground, makes its home, to a great extent, in the branches and hollows of large trees.

But though usually timid it is at times aroused to great anger, especially when startled. Such was now the case with the beast that confronted Mark. Every quill, or spine, was raised to its fullest and the porcupine emitted a strange hissing whistle which bode the youth no good.

Mark was startled, so much so that he slipped from the branch upon which he stood and came close to pitching to the ground head first. But he caught another branch and with an effort swung himself up to a sitting position.

"Are you coming down?" called out Frank.

"I can't! Here's a porcupine, or something like it. He looks as if he was going to attack me."

As Mark spoke he felt in his pocket for his pistol and brought the weapon forth. It was fully loaded and he pointed it at the coendoo, which was now moving slowly backward as though to prepare for a leap upon him.

Crack! went the pistol and the porcupine was struck a glancing blow over the back. Then it made its leap, landing on Mark's breast!

For the instant the youth was almost paralyzed with fright. But mechanically he discharged his pistol a second time and the bullet lodged in the coendoo's breast. With a howl of pain it fell back, caught at the tree branch with its tail and missed it, and went plunging out of sight into the foliage and vines below.

"Did you kill it?" called out Frank.

"I don't know. It fell down. Look out it don't come on your head," answered Mark.

Frank already had his gun in hand, ready to be of service to his chum if possible. But the porcupine failed to appear and he called back that it must still be in the foliage of the tree.

With great caution Mark descended one branch

after another. Presently he caught sight of the animal, hanging from a limb by its tail, an appendage which in the coendoo is unusually strong and long. The beast was plainly dying but to make certain Mark put another bullet through it. Then with the butt of the pistol he unwound the tail and the carcass fell to the ground with a thud.

"That was a surprise party I didn't expect," said Mark, when he was once more beside Frank. "How he scared me when he leaped at me! See, his quills drew blood," and he showed the back of his pricked hand."

"Wonder if the porcupine is good eating?"

"I've been told the meat is like that of a suckling pig. We'll skin him and take him along. Who knows but what we may need the meat badly before we get out of our mess."

It was a difficult task to skin the coendoo and it caused them more than one wound. But at last it was finished, and with their game over their shoulders and their guns in hand, they started out in the direction of the stream Mark had located from the tree top.

The day proved an extremely hot one and the boys had not covered half the distance when they

found they had to sit down and rest. On all sides was the trackless jungle: trees, bushes and vines, with an occasional opening, where grew the most gorgeous of ferns and flowers. Where the ground was damp, monstrous toadstoods reared their umbrella-like heads and the moss was six to eight inches deep. Insects of a hundred varieties were numerous and among them crawled lizards and other small creatures for which they could find no name. Orchids abounded, some entwining around the trees to a great height. The odor was so strong at times as to be positively sickening.

"They say that some of these orchids can put you in a sleep from which you will never awaken," said Mark. "I don't know if it's true or not, but if we have to sleep in the open another night let us take good care to keep away from anything that smells as strong as that plant yonder."

"I heard the professor tell that one orchid produces vanilla," said Frank. "He said there were over three thousand varieties of the plant."

Again the forward march was resumed and when both were almost too tired to fight their way another step a river came into sight, flowing lazily along in the sultry daylight. Both looked at the water for a

minute in silence then turned to each other in perplexity.

"It doesn't look like the Orinoco," declared Frank. "At least, not like the part just above the camp."

"Exactly what I was thinking, Frank. I believe we've struck another stream entirely."

"Then we are worse lost than we were before."

"Perhaps not. This may be a tributary of the Orinoco. If so, by following this we are bound to find the Orinoco itself sooner or later."

"True, but this may flow along for miles before it joins the Orinoco, and if it does join that stream, the question is: Does it join above or below the camp?"

"I'm sure I can't answer that question, now. The only thing we can do is to follow this stream and trust to luck."

"If only we had a canoe!"

"True, but we haven't one, and no tools with which to even make a raft. We'll have to keep on hoofing it, as the saying goes."

They had brought with them the remains of the baked curassow and on this they now proceeded to make a dinner. Both longed for some bread and

vegetables. They were afraid to touch the berries and other things growing around them for fear of being poisoned.

By throwing some brushwood into the stream they soon made certain of the direction of the current and this accomplished set off once more, after washing down the fowl meat with the coolest drink of water they could find. Fortunately the bank of the stream was tolerably clear of bushes so they made much more rapid progress than before.

"I have an idea," said Frank, as they moved around a bend into which a mass of driftwood had collected. "Do you see yonder tree trunk, caught in the mud? Why can't we shove that out into the water and take a ride? It will rest us, and I think the trunk will move just about as fast as we can walk, when once it gets started."

"I'm willing to try it," answered Mark, and they set to work to dislodge the tree, which looked as if it had been in the water for some time. Once loose they sprang "aboard," as Frank called it, and shoved into the stream proper. Caught by the current the tree trunk swung along the surface of the watercourse more rapidly than they had anticipated.

"This is something like," cried Frank, seating

himself on one of the upmost branches. "It's every bit as good as a canoe."

"If it don't take a notion to turn over and dump us into the stream," answered Mark. "It seems to me it's a little shaky."

Nevertheless, he, too, was satisfied and sitting side by side they allowed the tree to carry them down the river. Soon several miles were covered and then they noticed that the watercourse was growing narrower and that the current was correspondingly stronger.

"My, but we are flying along now," remarked Frank.

"Perhaps we had better try to steer the tree into shore," returned Mark. "I don't like this increase in speed. We may be drifting toward some rapids or a waterfall."

He had hardly spoken when the tree whirled around, almost sending both in the water. As they clutched at the branches they felt the speed increase. The river was now not more than a quarter of its former width and the water foamed up here and there, showing that there were rocks not far below the surface. Rocks could also be seen along the shores and presently they passed a tall cliff filled

with birds, the flock swooping off in several directions at their approach.

"I hear water falling ahead!" ejaculated Frank. "Hark!"

"Yes! yes! We are coming to a waterfall!" burst out Mark. "Let us try to turn the tree into shore by all means. If we don't we may be drowned!"

Each had a tree branch in his hand, with which he had been trying to paddle from time to time. Now both endeavored to use the tree branches as rudders, but in a trice Mark's was caught in some rocks and torn from his grasp. A second later the tree bounced up and spun around, throwing the boys flat among the branches. Dazed and bewildered they clung fast, fearing that the next lurch of the tree would send them into the stream, which now foamed and boiled on all sides of them.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOCKLEY AND THE BOA-CONSTRICTOR

"It is high time the boys came back."

So spoke Professor Strong, on the evening following the departure of Frank and Mark up the Orinoco. It was after nine o'clock, and all was silent around the camp save for the distant cries of the night birds and the howling of the monkeys. The professor stood on the edge of the bluff, gazing anxiously through the gloom that overhung the broad watercourse.

"It is odd they are not back," said Darry, who was close at hand. "I hope no harm has befallen them."

Hockley had already thrown himself down in the tent and was fast asleep, despite a plague of gnats which had but recently put in an appearance. Sam sat by the fire sewing up a hole he had torn in his jacket. The Indian was at the water's edge, fishing with a net he had made of braided vines.

As the time slipped by Professor Strong, Darry

and Sam grew more anxious and none of them felt like going to sleep. The Indian came in and threw himself down and then the others sat down to talk in whispers.

By daybreak the professor had made up his mind to go after the missing ones. He decided to take Cubara with him, leaving the others to watch the camp.

"If I find the boys I'll be back before dinner time," said Professor Strong. "If not, I won't return until they are found."

"Well, I'm sure I hope you have quick luck," said Sam. "We'll be very anxious until you return."

Soon the professor and the Indian were out of sight and the boys turned back to put the camp in order. Hockley threw himself on a rock, declining to take a hand in the work.

"You ought to do your share," said Sam. "It's not fair to expect us to do everything."

"You shut up!" cried Hockley. "I'll do as I please. If you say a word I'll pitch into you!"

He was in an ill humor and spoiling for a fight, as Darry and Sam could readily see. Yet Sam was not daunted.

"It's not fair, Hockley. Everybody ought to do his share of the work," he went on.

"Oh, leave him alone, Beans," came from Darry. "We can't stop him from being lazy."

The words had scarcely been uttered when the angry youth, caught up a billet of wood and flung it at Darry. It struck the lad in the shoulder hurting him not a little. Darry rushed at him, but leaping up with a club in his hands, Hockley stood on guard.

"Leave me alone!" he exclaimed. "The first of you to get too close will get a crack with this."

"Let us both pitch into him," came from Sam. "He ought to have a first-class thrashing."

"You let me alone!" howled Hockley. "Don't you dare to touch me!"

"Drop that club," came from Darry. "Drop it, I say, or Sam and I will certainly pitch into you and you'll get more than you want."

"I—I won't drop the club until you promise to let me alone."

"Why did you fling that piece of wood at me?"

"You hadn't any right to jaw at me."

"It was your business to do your share of the work here."

A war of words followed, and in the end Hockley dropped the club and consented to do some of the

work. As soon as it was finished, he picked up his gun and started to move off.

"Where are you going?" demanded Darry. "The professor told us to remain here until he got back."

"I'm going down the river a bit. I reckon there's no harm in that," answered Hockley and without waiting for further argument he strode away and was soon lost to sight in the jungle.

"He wouldn't go off like that if he wasn't boiling mad," observed Sam.

After cleaning up the two boys started in to fish, there being nothing else by which to while away the time. But biting was not lively, and after half an hour of only fair success they walked up the bluff again. They had just reached the tent when they heard a gun-shot, followed by a yell of fright.

"That's Hockley!" ejaculated Darry. "He has stirred up something and it has scared him to death."

"Help! help!" came faintly to their ears. "Help!"

"We had better go and see what is the matter," said Sam, and caught up a rifle. Darry had already reached for a shotgun, and thus armed both boys sped down the bluff again and in the direction from whence the cries proceeded.

"Help! save me!" screamed the unfortunate youth.

They had not far to go. Beyond the bend of the stream was an inlet and back of this a somewhat open glade, bordered by half a dozen low-drooping rubber trees. Among these trees stood Hockley, fairly paralyzed with terror and close at hand, swinging from a branch, was a boa-constrictor all of fifteen feet in length.

"Oh, what a snake!" burst out Darry, and then stood still, hardly knowing whether to proceed or not.

Sam said nothing, but brought his rifle to his shoulder, took quick aim and pulled the trigger. The bullet sped true and buried itself in the boa-constrictor's neck.

The shot awakened Darry to action and now he too blazed away, peppering the big snake in the head and body. The second shot from his gun was at close range and fairly tore a piece of skin from the huge reptile's neck.

But a boa-constrictor is not easily killed, and though badly wounded it yet had a great deal of fight in it. Still holding to the tree branch with its tail it shot forth its body and in an instant had Hockley by the waist.

"Help! save me!" screamed the unfortunate

youth. "Oh, please save me! Don't let him crush me to pieces!"

In an agony of fear he tried to pull himself loose, but without avail. The snake lifted him up from the ground with ease, intending doubtless to crush him to a jelly on the tree trunk.

But now Sam rushed as close as had Darry. The rifle was a repeating weapon—one of the best the party possessed—and shoving it at the snake's head the youth let drive twice in quick succession. Then, without waiting to see the effect of these shots, he put two additional bullets in the boa-constrictor's body. The reptile quivered from head to tail then remained motionless.

It was an anxious moment and the hearts of all three boys seemed to stop beating. Hockley tried to call out, but could not, for the boa-constrictor was fairly crushing in his ribs.

But after that moment had passed the boys saw that they had won the battle. The head of the boa-constrictor dropped and the muscles of the huge body relaxed. Then Hockley slipped to the damp earth and slowly the reptile's body dropped on top of him.

"He must be dead," whispered Darry, hoarsely,

and with his gun started to release Hockley from the loathsome weight. Sam assisted, and soon they had him free and was dragging him out of harm's way. From a safe distance they watched the boa-constrictor and at last felt certain that it was dead.

"He's in a bad way," said Sam, leaning over Hockley. The youth lay in a heap, totally unconscious and breathing with difficulty.

"It was awful," returned Darry. "What a close shave! Let us take him down to the river and bathe his face."

They did as suggested, but even this failed to revive Hockley. Then Darry ran back to the camp for some medicine which was administered with care. But it was fully an hour before Hockley opened his eyes.

"Take him off!" he moaned. "Take the horrible thing off!"

"You're safe now, Hockley," said Darry, kindly. "The boa-constrictor is dead." But Hockley was now out of his mind and did not understand, and he continued to plead most piteously that they save him from being crushed to death.

"We'll have to carry him back to camp," said Sam, and this was done. It was no easy task to get

the hurt one up the bluff. Once in camp they fixed Hockley a soft bed and did all they could to make him otherwise comfortable.

"I never want to see another boa-constrictor, not even in a menagerie," declared Sam. "I'll dream of that thing for a week."

The boys remained in camp after that. It was nightfall before Hockley came to his senses and then he complained of a severe pain in the chest. They uncovered him and rubbed him down with liniment.

"Is it dead?" he asked. "How did you kill it?" And when they told him he shook his head slowly, as if in wonder. Later on he called them both to him. "I'm much obliged for what you did," he said humbly. "It was great. I shan't forget it. I'm sorry we had the row."

"So am I sorry," returned Sam, and Darry nodded to show he agreed. "We can't afford to quarrel out here, Jake. We may need each other's help, eh?"

"That's just what I was thinking. I guess I was a big fool to start it anyway. Let's call it off, will you?"

"Certainly!" cried Darry.

"With all my heart," came from Sam.

Hockley took the hand of each and pressed it briefly. He looked one and the other in the eyes and then his gaze dropped. "All right, we'll be friends," he said, in a lower voice than ever.

Nobody felt like talking after this. Darry started up the fire and got out some things for dinner. Sam brought up the fish and cleaned them. Hockley turned over on his back and dozed away, occasionally uttering a low groan. Yet every one of the lads felt better because of what had just passed.

CHAPTER XXXII

A PEEP AT GOLD AND SILVER MINES

"THE tree is caught fast!"

"I know it, Frank, but I don't think it will stay caught for long!"

What the two chums said was true—the tree had caught in the boiling and foaming water, directly in the middle of the stream. The spray was flying all about them, so that they could scarcely make out what was ahead. But they heard a noise that could mean but one thing. A waterfall was there, dashing with a roar over the rocks and falling into a big pool below.

A minute went by. The tree was swinging around slowly. Now it began to grate along the rocks. Of a sudden an end bobbed up and then the tree was free, and on it rushed for the waterfall.

"We are going over!" shrieked Frank, and held fast, not knowing exactly why. Mark tried to answer, but the roar all around them drowned out every other sound.

On they went for a hundred yards, between rocks standing up higher than their heads. Then the brink of the waterfall was gained and here the tree seemed to pause for a moment. Over it went, carrying the boys with it, over and down, out of the sunlight into utter darkness.

By instinct more than reason both boys clung fast to the tree and that was their salvation. Down they went into the pool and the torrent of water came on top of them, sending them far beneath the surface. How long they remained under they could not tell, afterward, but it seemed an age. When they came up each was more dead than alive. But still they clung to the tree as it drifted away and lodged among the rocks a short distance further down the river.

"Frank, are you all right?" Mark asked the question, feebly, some ten minutes later.

"I—I guess so," was the gasped out answer. "But, oh, Mark, wasn't it an awful tumble?"

"That's what it was, Frank. I didn't think we'd come out of it alive."

They left the tree and sat down on the rocks, and there rested for over an hour. The noise of the waterfall still thundered in their ears, but otherwise all was silent.

At last Mark arose and stretched himself. "If we are all right we may as well go on again," he said.

"On the tree?"

"Yes. I don't think there is any danger of another waterfall—at least not close by. We can watch the water and if the current gets too swift we can turn into shore before the tree gets beyond our control again."

So it was agreed, and soon they were on the way once more. Below the falls the river was narrow for several miles but the current was not very swift, for much of the water was carried off by side streams flowing in various directions.

"We don't seem to be getting to the Orinoco very fast," observed Frank, after all of five miles had been covered. "I'll wager we are at least twenty to thirty miles from camp."

"Perhaps we are. But what do you advise? We can't sit down here and suck our thumbs."

"Hark! What was that? A gunshot?"

"It sounded more like a distant explosion," cried Mark, leaping to his feet. "There it goes again. An explosion sure enough. What can it mean?"

"I think I know," answered Frank. "It means that we are near some kind of a mine. That was the blasting of rocks."

"I hope you are right, Frank. It came from down the river, didn't it?"

"It did. Let us go on. There may be a regular miners' camp below here."

Once more they allowed their improvised craft to drift down the stream. The character of the country was changing, and presently they found themselves hemmed in by high rocky walls. Then came a bend eastward and they came in sight of a small settlement. There were a dozen houses built of timber covered with corrugated iron, and a small engine house with a tall iron smokestack. Back of the settlement were the openings to several gold and silver mines. As they approached another explosion rent the air and they saw a large section of a cliff give way and fall to the rocks below.

There were several boats tied up to a tiny dock running along the river, and the men on these gazed curiously at the boys as they drifted up and leaped aboard one of the craft.

"Where come you from?" demanded one of the men, in Spanish.

"We are American," said Mark. "Can you speak English?"

"Americans, eh?" put in another man. "I'm an American myself. How did you get on that tree?"

"It's a long story," answered Mark. "We were with a party along the Orinoco but we went ashore and got lost. Are we far from that river?"

"Eight miles. You look pretty wet."

"We came over the falls."

"Gee whiz! It's a wonder you are alive!" burst out the American, whose name was Simon Smither. "Come ashore, and I'll take you to the boss. This place is Castroville. Maybe you've heard of it. We have here the Little Bolivar and the Moonlight Mines, two of the best payers in this section of the country."

"Castroville!" ejaculated Frank. He remembered that Andy Hume had once mentioned the place to him. "Is there a newcomer here by the name of Andy Hume?"

"There is. He's up to the office now. So you know him?"

"We do," answered Mark, and then told their story while the whole party hurried from the river

to where the offices of the mines were located, not far from the engine house.

Andy Hume saw them coming and leaped up from a stool to receive them. "I declare," he cried. "Where did you come from? Thought you were hunting and fishing along the Orinoco."

"We were," answered Frank, and told of how they had become lost and of what had followed. "We must get back as soon as we can," he added. "The professor and the others will be much worried over our absence."

The matter was talked over, and by consulting one of the managers of the mines they obtained permission to use one of the boats, taking with them a native boatman who knew all the rivers of the vicinity thoroughly.

"He'll get you back safe and sound," said Andy Hume. "He's a first rate fellow. He brought me here from Navaleno, forty miles away."

"But how did you happen to come here?" questioned Mark. "I thought you were going prospecting?"

"So I was, but at Navaleno I met an old miner friend of mine, Captain Richards. He has an interest here and he wants me to look after it while he

takes a trip to the States. So I'm booked here at a salary of two hundred dollars per month and found. Not so bad that, eh?" And the boys agreed that the arrangement was certainly very promising.

A comfortable meal and a chance to dry their clothing made both boys feel much better. While they were eating they asked a number of questions about the mines and when they had finished Andy Hume insisted upon showing them around.

"The output of these mines will be about six hundred thousand dollars this year," he said. "To get out the gold and silver will cost the combined companies about two hundred thousand dollars, leaving a profit to the stockholders of four hundred thousand dollars. We have here all the latest machinery with the exception of a newly-patented quartz crusher which is now being built for us in the United States. At first the mining around here was what is commonly called cradling or placer mining, —that is, the miners would pick up what they could find on the surface or by ordinary digging—but that is past and all we get has to be blasted out of the mountains."

An hour was spent in and around the mines, inspecting the shafts and the various machines for ex-

tracting the gold and silver. Then the boatman came up to announce that the boat was ready and they started to leave.

As they did so a strange boat, containing several passengers, arrived at the dock close at hand. As the passengers came toward where Frank and Mark were standing, the latter plucked the former hurriedly by the sleeve.

"See there, Frank," he whispered.

Frank looked in the direction and gave a start.

"Why it's that Dan Markel, the fellow who robbed Hockley!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TOGETHER AGAIN—CONCLUSION

THE two boys were much surprised by the unexpected appearance of the man from Baltimore and for the moment knew not what to say or do.

"Do you know one of those men?" asked Andy Hume.

"Yes, that one," answered Mark, pointing out the wrong-doer. "His name is Dan Markel, and he robbed Jacob Hockley of his watch and nearly all of his money."

"You don't say! Then he won't be the fellow we want here."

By this time Markel was close at hand. Now for the first time he caught sight of the boys and he halted in dismay.

"So we've met again," said Mark, coldly.

"Why—er—how are you?" stammered the man from Baltimore. He knew not what to say.

"I suppose you've got Jake Hockley's watch with

you," put in Frank. "If you have, you had better pass it over to us."

"You—er—you talk in riddles," returned Markel. "I know nothing of his watch excepting that it was taken from him while in a crowd."

"You took the watch yourself, Mr. Markel," put in Mark, boldly. "And what is more, you sent for his valise and robbed that. It is utterly useless for you to deny it. If there is any officer in this settlement I shall have you arrested."

At this the man from Baltimore turned pale. He started as if to run away, then saw how hopeless such a move would be and held his ground.

The talk had attracted a crowd, which included the general manager of the mining settlement, Mr. John Brisbam. He now demanded to know what it meant, and, with many interruptions from Markel, Mark and Frank told of the Hockley affair and of what had occurred at Macuto.

"We can prove all we say, if you'll only give us a little time," added Mark. "As soon as I can find my friends again I'll bring them here. In the meantime I would like this man placed under arrest."

"Arrest! Not much!" howled Dan Markel. "It —it's an outrage! I am an honest American citizen

and I demand protection. There is a great mistake. I am not the person they are after."

"Do you mind being searched?" asked Andy Hume, shrewdly.

"You have no right to touch me!" returned the man from Baltimore in increased alarm.

A war of words, which nearly came to blows followed, but in the end Dan Markel was marched into one of the offices of the mining company. Here his pockets were examined and from one was taken Hockley's watch.

"There are Hockley's initials," said Mark, pointing them out. "J. A. H. don't stand for Daniel Markel."

"That's right they don't," came from Andy Hume. "He's a black sheep sure as you're born. All this money must belong to Hockley, too," he added, counting up a quantity of gold and silver amounting to nearly three hundred dollars. The balance of the funds had already been squandered by the man from Baltimore.

Dan Markel raved and even swore at the treatment he received, and in the end he was handcuffed. The watch and money were placed in Mr. Brisbam's hands for safe keeping, and the prisoner was marched

to one of the houses and a guard set, in order that he might not escape.

A little later Mark and Frank set off with the native boatman for the camp on the Orinoco. It was already growing dark, but the native knew the course well, so there was no danger of going astray.

"I see the campfire!" cried Frank, when they were yet half a mile off. "How good it looks! Almost like home!"

"I feel as if we had been away an age," returned Mark. "I can tell you I don't want to get lost again."

"You are right, Mark; the very word is enough to give one the shivers."

As they drew closer they set up a loud shout, which was presently answered by Sam and Darry, who came rushing down to the water's edge to receive them.

"We had almost given you up," said Darry. "Where in the world have you been?"

"We've been further than we intended to go," answered Mark. "Where is the professor and the others?"

"The professor and Cubara are out looking for you. Hockley is in the tent. He fell in with a boa-

constrictor and the snake nearly crushed him to death."

"We've got news for him—news he'll be glad to hear," said Frank.

All walked up the bluff to the campfire and there each told his story. In the midst of the recitals Hockley roused up. He could scarcely believe his ears when listening to what Mark and Frank had to tell concerning Dan Markel.

"I'm glad you collared him," he said, faintly. "I didn't mind the money so much, but I hated to part with the watch. What will you do next? I can't go over to that mining camp yet. I'm too sore."

"We'll see what the professor says," said Mark.

The professor and the Indian came in a short while later. They had been up and down the river for miles and were thoroughly disheartened. When Professor Strong saw Frank and Mark he was overjoyed and could scarcely keep from hugging them.

"I was so afraid you had met your death in the jungle I knew not what to do," he said. "I did not sleep a wink last night. We picked up your trail twice and lost it. We found the canoe and that led me to think that perhaps you were drowned."

"We have had adventures enough to last us a year," returned Mark. "I can tell you a life in the jungle is all well enough to read about, but in reality it isn't half so pleasant as one imagines."

It was arranged that all hands should move to the mining settlement the next afternoon, starting after the sun had spent its force for the day. Hockley was to be made comfortable in Cubara's recovered canoe, with the professor to wait on him, while the other boys made the passage in the craft brought from Castroville.

The next morning was a busy one, for there were many things to pack up. Sam, Darry, Mark and Frank went out for a last hunt, taking Cubara with them. They brought in several peccaries and a score of birds, including two beautiful Venezuelan trumpeters, which they had found wading in a pool half a mile distant from the Orinoco.

"This ends our outing tour in Venezuela I suppose," said Frank. "Well, I am not sorry. We have still a good deal of ground to cover and we can't afford to spend too much time in one place."

Four o'clock of the next day saw them embarking at the foot of the bluff. They had carried Hockley to the canoe and now the disabled youth was placed

on a grassy cushion which would add to the comfort of the boat ride.

"Good-bye to the camp!" cried Darry, as the boats left the shore. "More than likely we'll never see the place again. Good-bye!" And the others echoed the words. Soon the turn in the river hid the locality from their view.

A few words more and we will bring to a close this story of sight seeing and adventures in Venezuela.

When our friends reached Castroville a surprise awaited them. Despite the guard which had been set, Dan Markel had escaped through the night, stolen one of the small boats on the river, and departed for parts unknown. A search lasting two hours had been instituted but had proved of no avail.

"We followed him down the stream to where there are several forks," said Andy Hume. "He took to one of them, but which one we don't know."

"But he didn't take any of my stuff with him, did he?" was Hockley's anxious question.

"No, he escaped with nothing but his clothing and a pistol he stole from his guard."

"Then let him go," returned the lank youth. "I never want to see him again."

"I think myself it is just as well," said Professor Strong. "To prosecute him would put us to a great deal of trouble. If he hasn't a cent he will have a hard enough time of it getting along down here."

"Right you are," said Andy Hume. "I'll wager he'll bitterly regret that he ever left the States."

When Hockley received his things back he wished to reward Frank and Mark for what they had done, but the two boys would not listen to this. Then he said that he was very grateful and hoped that they should be friends in the future.

"I've made up with Darry and Beans," he said to Frank and Mark. "And I want to make up with you, too."

"All right, it suits me!" answered Frank, readily, and Mark also agreed, and they shook hands.

There was an empty house in the mining settlement and this was turned over to our friends temporarily, and here Hockley rested until he felt once more like himself. During this time the other boys made a number of trips up into the mountains, viewing other mines of lesser importance. Thus several weeks slipped by.

"All told we've had some pretty good times here," declared Mark to the other boys, one day. "I hope we have as good in our future travels." His wish was fulfilled, and how will be related in another volume of this series.

In this tale we will not only meet all of our friends again, but also Dan Markel and learn something of what became of the fellow after he left Castroville, and of how he plotted fresh trouble for those who had exposed him.

And now for the present let us bid Professor Strong and our young friends adieu. We have followed them in an interesting trip from one end of Venezuela to the other, have visited the capital and other important cities, and have gone with them up the Orinoco and into the jungle. Our friends have had numerous adventures and have been in several positions of more or less peril. But all has turned out well, and here we will say good-bye.

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